



The



COLONEL'S
EXPERIMENT



EDITH BARBARA DELANO

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THE COLONEL'S
EXPERIMENT





"Molly and Sybil . . . were doing their best to make up for lost time."

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

BY

EDITH BARNARD DELANO

AUTHOR OF "THE LAND OF CONTENT," ETC.



ILLUSTRATED

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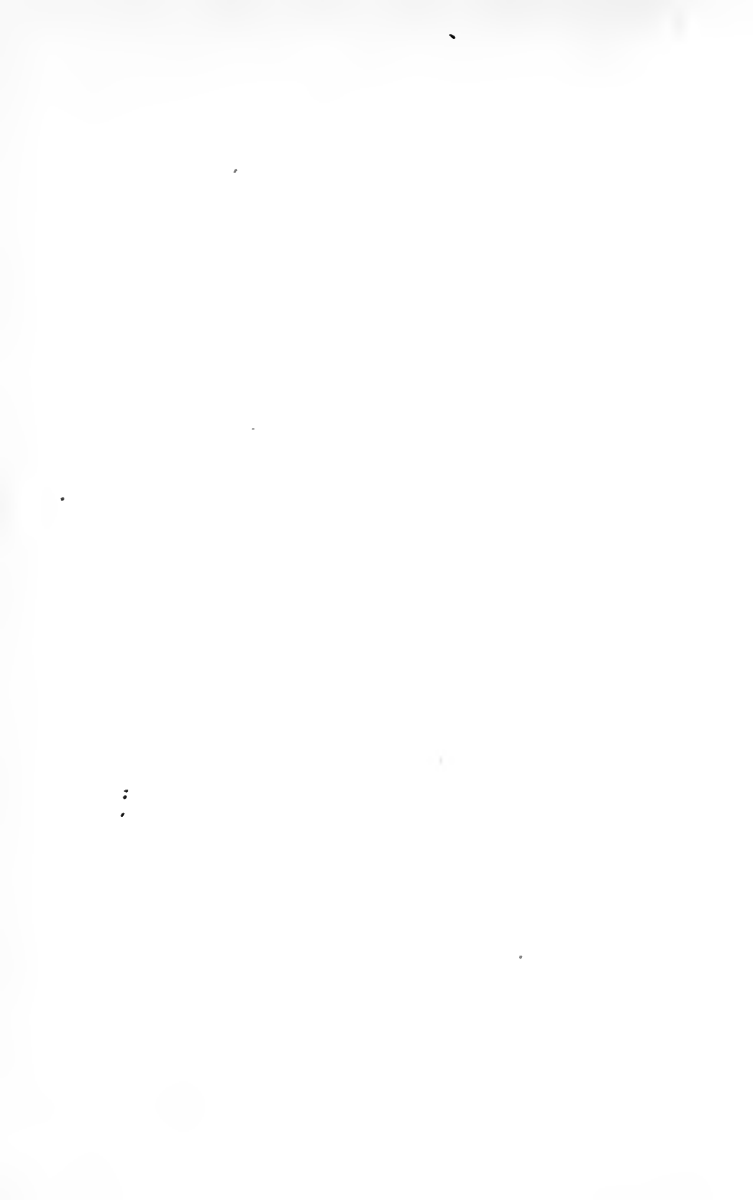
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*To the friends in Deerfield
who like the story*



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The Colonel's Experiment

I

INTRODUCES THE CRAWFORDS

THE twins were flattening their shapely noses against the dining-room window panes. It had to be the dining-room, because during the doctor's office hours the family living-room was used, in easy village fashion, as a reception room for patients.

"There comes Billy now," cried Bobs.

But Bunny, in the farther window, had a better view.

"No," she said, "it's only a patient. You might know Billy wouldn't be coming home alone."

"I know," Bobs agreed. "Those two might as well be twins themselves. You just can't separate them. And Don belongs to us as much as to her, and they both just make me"—

"Girls! Girls!" exclaimed Mrs. Crawford,

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looking up over her sewing table, and laughing at them.

The girls turned quickly; and when they turned it was evident that they were as like as two petals of a rose, except that Roberta's eyes were gray and her sister's a sparkling blue. Their only outward difference was in size and manner. Roberta, a full inch the taller, was slender as Abundance could never hope to be; she bore herself with a boyish freedom which was sorely trying to her twin. Abundance was plump; and self-evident though it was, she could never accept the fact philosophically. She was fond of dress, and her hair ribbons were always laid in neat little rolls in the left-hand corner of her top bureau drawer; Roberta's were never in place, and only too seldom on her hair. Yet different though they were in disposition, the two adored each other; and now, at their mother's reproof, Abundance was ready to defend her twin.

"But it is perfectly true, Mother-dear," said Bunny. "They might just as well be *twins*, from the way they stick together. You know as well as we do that Don belongs to us as much as to Billy—I mean Syb; she's

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only a plain sister to him, just exactly as we are, yet she sim-ply mo-nop-olizes him!"

Bunny had grown very dramatic over her grievance, but Mrs. Crawford only smiled again. "Or is it Donald who monopolizes Sybil?" she quietly asked.

The twins looked at each other; perhaps something of the kind had suggested itself to them before. "Well, anyway," said Bunny, after a pause, "the result is the same. And when an oldest brother has only two more days of his vacation, I do think it ought to be a case of share and share alike!"

"At any rate," Roberta declared with great dignity, "if they wanted to get rid of us, they had only to say so, and not pretend to race us home by another way."

Mrs. Crawford kept her eyes on her sewing, the better to hide her amusement. "Oh, surely," she said, "neither Donald nor Sybil could have wanted to—to get rid of you!"

"It looks very much like it," said Bobs severely.

Hallam, the youngest member of the Crawford family, looked up from his geography, which was spread before him on the dining-room table, and chuckled. Bunny started

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towards him; but as she passed the door it opened, and a tall youth with eyes like her own caught her by the shoulders.

"Here they are, Syb!" he called. "Here they are! They've beaten us home! What a great thing it is to be young!"

Then dignity, grievance and suspicion fell from the twins, and they set upon the beloved tease with four fists that beat as one. Sybil made her way past the scrambling trio towards Mrs. Crawford, and, stooping, kissed her where the soft hair was beginning to turn gray on the temple.

"It's getting too dark for you to sew, Mother-dear," she said. "Hallam, look at your shoes! Bunny, you'll ruin your voice if you screech so! Bobs, here's your red hair-ribbon; it was waving from the palings of Mrs. Black's gate, but I knew it was yours from the ink spots. Where's Dad?"

She had taken off her hat and coat in the hall, and now she drew up a small chair beside the work table, leant over, and pressed her cold cheek against her mother's. It would have been evident to an observer of the little scene that there was a peculiarly tender bond between the two. Mrs. Crawford had

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an ever-ready smile or caress for the other members of her family; but towards this tall, dark girl with the curling brown hair, and the large gray eyes which seemed almost black under their black brows and lashes, there was always something of added warmth, of deepened tenderness, of greater satisfaction. To Doctor and Mrs. Crawford all their children were satisfactory and deeply beloved; but insensibly they took Sybil, the adopted child, more into their companionship, gave her more of their confidence, held her, in fact, as the peculiarly dear eldest daughter, as if to make up to her whatever she might have missed in not being wholly their own.

So now Mrs. Crawford turned to kiss the cool cheek pressed to hers, and smiled into the clear gray eyes as she said:

"Have you had a good time, darling? Donald has only another day of vacation, and I do want him to crowd into it all the pleasure he can. Where have you been?"

Sybil glanced towards the twins and laughed. "We all four went over to Hunter's Hill for the last slide of the season; but there was not enough snow left to make the tobogganing good. So Don suggested that

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Bunny and Bobs take the west road, and he and I the State road, and see which pair got home first. Of course, we'd have beaten them, but we stopped at the Greshams', and then Jack Wetherbee and Mabel joined us, and then we went to the postoffice—Oh, and here are two letters!"

The twins, interested in Sybil's recital, had left Donald to smooth his hair and arrange his neck-tie, and drawn nearer the fireplace. "Two letters!" they cried in unison. "Where are they?"

It was plain that letters were events in the Crawford family, as well as pleasures shared by all. The twins made a rush, with outstretched hands, but Donald tossed the letters over their heads into his mother's lap. "One for you from Auntie, Mother-dear," he said, "and one for Dad. No, you don't, little girls! It's not polite to grab, and it's not polite to read post-marks! You must cultivate the virtue of patience, young 'uns!"

And with a restraining arm about the neck of each of the twins, he held them while Mrs. Crawford opened her letter and read bits of it aloud.

It was evident that she found it deeply in-

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teresting; but while Donald and Sybil listened politely, little Hallam returned to his geography, and the twins were squirming restlessly. At last Bobs exclaimed:

"Oh, don't people get *queer* when they get old; Auntie's a dear, of course; but *who* cares about her spring sewing! People ought to put nothing but interesting things in letters!"

"Why, Bobs!" Abundance protested, "I guess you'd care if it was Mother-dear's sewing that somebody disappointed about and your dresses!"

"Bunny! Your grammar!" cried Sybil.

But if Bunny had her little peculiarities, it would seem that Sybil had, also.

"Hand her the whip!" said Hallam.

"Keep in the middle of the road, old lady!" Don chimed in. "And walk them uphill!"

"Yes, drive us, drive!" said Bunny with mock bitterness. "Manage us all!"

Mrs. Crawford was folding her letter and putting it back in its envelope. "Children, children!" she mildly protested. "Bunny, my dear! Roberta, is that a tear in the back of your new skirt?"

Roberta hastily sat down. "Mother-dear, do read us your other letter!" she said, hop-

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ing to escape further remarks about her torn dress.

"It is not Mother-dear's letter," said Sybil. "It's addressed to Dad."

"Well, only just tell us where it's from, Mother-dear," Abundance begged, little dreaming of the surprise that was to follow her simple request.

Mrs. Crawford, with her tender smile that was half indulgence, half amusement, took up the letter and looked at the post-mark. Then, slowly, the smile faded, and with it the color from her face, even from her lips. As she held the letter and looked at it, her expression changed to one almost of fear.

Donald and Sybil sprang forward and bent over her. "Mother! Mother-dear! what is it? What is the matter?" the tall son cried in alarm; but it was to Sybil that she held out her hand, and it was Sybil that she drew down towards her.

"Sybil! Sybil!" she exclaimed, holding the girl's hand against her cheek.

Sybil, in her alarm, had dropped to her knees. "Mother-dear! Mother! what is it? Are you ill? Oh, darling"—

But Mrs. Crawford, looking down into

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Sybil's pale face, and realizing that she was alarming them all, called upon that inner store of courage which all mothers seem to possess, and even laughed a little, as if to allay their fears.

"No, no!" she cried. "It is nothing, nothing at all! I think I must have been sitting too long!" She closed her eyes for an instant, and once more pressed Sybil's hand to her cheek; then she stood up, and said, "It is nothing to be frightened about, children! I felt quite ill for a moment, but I am all right now! That is—I think I will speak to your father!"

And with that she arose and went toward the doctor's little office, and, with a murmur and a knock, turned the knob and went inside, closing the door firmly behind her.

The five young people looked from one to another. Bunny, the irrepressible, was the first to speak. "Now, what do you think of that?" she demanded of the company in general.

"Do you suppose it was the letter that made her feel sick?" Hallam asked; and Bobs turned to Donald, with "Where was that letter from, Don? You *know* you looked!"

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Donald hesitated a minute, then said, "Yes, I confess I did look! But it couldn't have been the letter that made her sick, for it was only from some little place nobody ever heard of in Maryland. That kind of letter doesn't frighten the life out of anybody."

Sybil, who had been looking with troubled eyes toward the closed office door, said, "No, it couldn't have been the letter. We don't know anybody in Maryland."

The twins began to look excited. "Oh," cried Bunny, "perhaps it's a mystery! Wouldn't it be perfectly lovely to have a mystery in the family?"

"Or a fortune left to us, or something like that!" Roberta added.

The merry chatter went on. Only Sybil remained silent and thoughtful; and when the office door opened and Doctor and Mrs. Crawford came into the room, it was only Sybil who noticed that her mother's face was still a little pale, and that there was a shade less of gayety than usual in the doctor's cheery greeting. Sybil went at once to Mrs. Crawford and put one arm about her waist.

"Precious dear, are you all right now?"

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she asked, while the others besieged the doctor with questions about the letter.

Mrs. Crawford, by way of answer, took the girl's face between her palms, and said, in a tone so low that the others could scarcely have heard, even if they had been listening:

"My little girl! My darling! You are as dear to me as any daughter in the world could be! Remember that always, always, Sybil!"

Then, perhaps because she saw the look of surprise and alarm that sprang into Sybil's eyes, she laughed, and gave her a little push. "There," she said, "run along and get on your things! Father wants you to drive with him this afternoon."

But Donald had caught the last remark. He turned to his father with a protest.

"Oh, I say, Dad," he cried. "You're not going to carry Sybil off with you on my last afternoon, are you?"

Dr. Crawford laid a friendly hand on his tall son's shoulder. "Sorry, old man, but that is just what I'm going to do!"

Father and son looked into each other's eyes with affection and understanding—and more; for Doctor Crawford was an intimate

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friend of each of his children, and their trust and faith in him was unbounded. For that matter, he was a friend of all the world; people in South Wickham said of him that he had a genius for friendship. His mission in life was one of healing, and he loved to heal the heart and the mind as well as the body. In fact, he had a way of seeking first for the ills of the spirit, for he held to the theory that when all is well with that, it is easier to cure mere physical ailments. Many a person called him in as friend and comforter and adviser; there was not a child in the village who did not know him and wave to him, nor an old person who did not love to see him drive by. So it was not remarkable that his children vied with one another for the pleasure of going with him.

Donald's eyes were smiling. "Well, if you *will* separate the members of a loving family, Dad, let me be the one to go with you!" he pleaded.

But the doctor shook his head. "Sorry, Don! I need my General Manager this afternoon!"

It was the title he used for Sybil when he

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was in a teasing mood; now Sybil responded with a laugh.

"Oh, call me anything you like, Dad darling; you know you couldn't get on without me for a day!"

She spoke the words thoughtlessly; but she caught the quick little look that passed between father and mother, and was conscious immediately of a vague feeling of foreboding, or fear.

"Why," she began, "what——"

But the doctor drew her out with him, his arm about her shoulders. "Time to be off," he said, and closed the door behind them, to go out to the dingy little runabout that had traveled so many miles of country road in all weathers.

For a moment there was silence in that comfortable dining-room which was usually so full of sound. It was as if a shadow of Sybil's feeling had fallen upon the ones left there. Then Donald spoke.

"There's something queer about this! Mother——"

But Mrs. Crawford looked up, and something he read in her face silenced him. The twins, however, broke forth into chatter.

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"Nothing the matter but the same old thing," said Bobs. "He just encourages Billy in liking to manage people. Now she's even beginning to think she manages some of his patients."

"Yes," Bunny agreed, while she preened herself before the mantel mirror, "and goodness knows, Billy's already far too boss-ious, as Norah says!"

"Well, we have Don to ourselves for a minute or two, anyway," said Bobs; and the twins fell upon him with embraces.

But Mrs. Crawford for once was oblivious of their noise. She sat looking into the fire with troubled eyes.

II

DAD READS A LETTER

IT was not until the entire family were seated at the supper table that evening that the subject of the letter was brought up again; and this time it was brought up, quite innocently, by the only one of them who had not been present during the scene in the earlier afternoon.

Richard, the family book-worm, who came between Sybil and the twins in age, was the kindest, most blundering soul alive; he invariably said the one thing that should have been left unuttered, was the most awkward, and was forever giving his brothers and sisters away, without in the least intending anything of the sort; and he was equally forever doing some small kindness, remembering something that others forgot, and getting in everyone's way with his well-meant ministrations.

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He sat on his mother's left at the table; Mrs. Crawford had a way of reminding him to eat, of giving him a quiet touch when he would have talked on or listened absorbedly until his food was cold; he shared her special care with Hallam, whose place was at her right. But Dick, oblivious though he was of his own comfort and interests, invariably noticed when anything was wrong with those he loved. This evening, quite suddenly, in the midst of a spirited discussion between the twins, their father and Donald, he exclaimed:

"I say, Dad! I think Mother-dear must need a tonic! She hasn't eaten any supper at all, and she's as white as paper!"

They turned, one and all; and Mrs. Crawford was, indeed, pale. The young people caught a strange look that passed between her and their father.

"Tell them now, Robert," she said. "We've all finished supper. Tell them. They have got to know!"

The twins gasped, and clasped each other's hands; Donald looked first at Sybil, then at his father, and flushed deeply.

The doctor pushed his chair back from the table, and smiled teasingly at the twins.

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"Well," he said, "there's not much mystery, young ladies! I regret to disappoint you, but we'll try to make the most of what there is."

He drew from his pocket the envelope with the Maryland postmark, put on his eyeglasses, and said:

"Perhaps I ought to tell you that this letter is from an old gentleman named William Crockett, a cousin of your grandfather's. I have not seen him for many years, and I had never expected to hear from him again. This letter was as great a surprise to your mother and me as it will be to you. It will explain itself.

Montebello, Montford Landing,
Maryland, March 20, 19——.

My dear Robert:

I venture to believe that, as your father's son, you are not a man who could repudiate the bonds of relationship nor ignore an appeal based upon them. Until lately I have had no desire to know anything of you nor to make any claim upon you. That you have shown a similar disposition has been a matter of satisfaction to me. Within the past few months, however, and after due deliberation, I have made inquiries concerning you, and I am told that you are practising your pro-

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fession in South Wickham, and are the father of sons and daughters.

As you are aware, I am childless; my sister Sophia and I have lived alone for years. We have come to that time of life where we know the infirmities of age, and not least among them I may count the feeling of loneliness. Sophia and I are two lonely old people.

It will give us great pleasure if you will allow one of your daughters to make us a visit of indefinite length. Don't send a boy. I have no use for boys. Even having a young girl in the house will be an experiment, but one from which I anticipate some pleasure.

You will not, I think, refuse this request from an old man whose nearest of kindred you are. Kindly wire me on the departure of the young lady, and she shall be met at the landing.

Yours to command,

WILLIAM CROCKETT.

When the doctor finished reading this extraordinary epistle, he looked into the most surprised circle of faces that he had ever beheld. But only Mrs. Crawford and Sybil remained silent; the others began to speak at once, in a torrent of questions and exclamations.

"Of all the rank impertinences!" cried Donald.

DAD READS A LETTER

"Oh, it was a mystery! It was! It was!" cried Bobs.

"Say, he's got his nerve with him, hasn't he?" said Dick, and Donald joined in again with, "I'd like to see him get one of our girls down there! Sounds like a cantankerous old wretch!"

"Boys are just as good as girls," said Hallam.

"When can we start, Mother-dear?" begged Bunny. "Can we have new challies, and get our spring hats trimmed in time?"

"What does he mean by your being his nearest relation?" asked Dick, and the doctor answered him through the babel of tongues.

"He meant just that, my son. I used to spend some very happy weeks at Montebello, when I was a lad. But I had not expected ever to hear from Colonel Crockett again. I can not refuse such a request as this from him."

And Bobs first gave her twin an ecstatic hug, then cried, "Oh, it's better than a mystery! Dad! When can we go?"

Their father pursed his lips and looked at them, shaking his head.

"What do you mean by that?" demanded

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Bunny. "Aren't you going to let us go? Oh, Daddy!"

It was Roberta who first hit upon the fact. "Oh!" she exclaimed, in as shocked a tone as she knew how to command. "Oh, Daddy! You aren't going to let Sybil go instead of us? Oh, Daddy!"

The doctor said, "Ask Sybil!"

Then again, for a moment, there was silence. Every one looked at Sybil; and to everyone it was plain that she knew who was to go. Donald leaned across the table toward her.

"Sybil!" he cried. "Sybil! You are not going away!" Then he turned to his father, his young face marked with distress. "Dad! You couldn't send Sybil away! You *couldn't*, Father!"

"It rests with Sybil herself," the doctor said.

Richard had been staring at his father with all the emphasis of his spectacles. "But, I say, Dad, if you've got to send anyone, it ought to be one of *us*!"

The doctor frowned, but before he could speak Donald added another protest.

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"That's right, Dad," he said, "it ought to be one of our own——"

This time the doctor would be heard. He brought his hand down upon the table with a force that made the cups jump in their saucers, and everyone stopped talking.

"Donald, Richard, you forget yourselves," he said, sternly. "Sybil is going to Maryland. That is decided. You may trust your father without further explanations."

Whereupon he walked into his office and closed the door. But now Donald was looking at his mother, his face pale and distressed. Mrs. Crawford arose, came around the table, laid her arms about his shoulders and her cheek against his hair.

"My dear son!" she said, and somehow Donald was sure that she understood all his distress.

"But, Mother——" he began; but Mrs. Crawford laid a finger on his lips, and murmured, "Not now, dear!"

So for the time no one talked of the surprising letter, although the very atmosphere was charged with excitement and curiosity. But when the younger members of the family had gone to bed, and Mrs. Crawford was

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with the doctor in the office, and Sybil was alone with Donald and Dick, she said:

"Oh, boys, why did you talk like that to Dad? Did you want to remind me that I'm nothing but an Adopted, and not really and truly one of you, like Bunny and Bobs?"

Richard threw down the book he had been trying to read, and cried, "Now, Syb! That's unfair of you!"

And Donald left his chair to stand in front of the fire, where he could look down at her. "It's just the other way, Sybil," he said, "and you know it! If you were not an Adopted we could send you off and knock you around and do any old thing to you. But as it is, we have to take extra good care of you, and watch over you, and—and all that sort of thing. We just have to, Syb! Don't you see?"

Sybil was looking into the last red glow of the fire. "It's just because I'm not, really and truly, *'one of us,'* that I particularly want to go. You see, since my father and mother died, and my own father gave me to Mother-dear and Dad, I have been so much like their own, ownest child that the girls and Hallam don't even dream I'm not! Dad

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has some reason—I don't know what—for wanting to do as this old gentleman asks; and if I can do anything in this world to show him and Mother-dear how grateful I am for all they have done for me, I am going to do it."

"Sentimental stuff!" said Donald.

"It is more than that, Don," Sybil calmly protested. "Dad spends his whole life looking after people; and Mother-dear is as nearly an angel as it's safe to be; and they have never for one single minute made me feel that they loved me less than any of the rest of you. Well, I am going to do all I can to prove myself the true child of their teaching and training, even by going to take care of those old people, if that is the first way that comes along."

"Well, I don't understand it," Donald said. "It's not like Father to ship you off to a stranger. I don't like it."

III

THE TRAIN PULLS OUT

FOR a fortnight after Donald's return to college the doctor's household was busy with preparations for Sybil's departure. Mrs. Crawford made an inventory of all that Sybil possessed in the way of clothing; then there was a long consultation and a whole morning spent in shopping in the nearest large city. A shopping trip was always an event for the Crawford girls; and Bobs and Bunny felt very much left out of things because this time the purchases were all for Sybil. They held themselves rather aloof from the opening of the parcels and boxes—as much as their curiosity allowed; but when Mrs. Wicks arrived and the actual sewing began, a strange and unusual calm fell upon them.

“What on earth is the matter with the twins?” Doctor Crawford asked his wife one evening when they were alone.

THE TRAIN PULLS OUT

Mrs. Crawford laughed. "Well, you know they were quite jealous of Sybil's going to Maryland, at first. They are trying to be dignified and disapproving about it now, but I think their hearts are weakening."

The doctor laughed with her. "I see! You had better be near to support poor Sybil when the thaw arrives!" he said.

But the thaw, as the doctor called it, did not arrive until so many of Sybil's new garments were finished that the big trunk had to be brought down from the attic to hold them. Thereafter they followed Sybil everywhere, upstairs and downstairs, indoors and out, during every moment they could be at home. They watched her with round, wistful eyes, until she felt, at times, as if eyes were peering at her from every shadow, as they do in nightmares. Sybil had not the heart to remonstrate with them, for their distress was very genuine; but she confided to the doctor that she really could not stand it very much longer. Her father laughed.

"Poor chickens!" he said. "No; it wouldn't do to snub them for it. They feel that they are exploring the sorrow of the world, and

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although it is painful, it also has its fascination for them."

Every hour of the two weeks was crowded with work or fun. Mrs. Crawford wanted to consult Sybil about one thing or another, Mrs. Wicks was constantly demanding her for a fitting, the twins were always getting in her way, Dick was forever begging her to come out for a walk, and the doctor would have liked her to drive with him every afternoon. Then, there were all the friends in the village, who clamored for farewell visits; there were more invitations to dinner or supper than she could have accepted in a month, and all her friends brought something for her to take away with her, some little remembrance in the shape of a pretty thing to wear or something to read or something useful for her bureau or traveling-bag.

But at last the day of her departure arrived, and all of the family and most of her friends were on the station platform to bid her farewell.

The doctor went with her as far as New York. As he kissed her good-bye, he said:

"You have your money and tickets all safe? That's right! Now remember, take a carriage

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at the station in Baltimore, and go to Pier 18; your boat leaves at ten, and you ought to get to the Montebello landing, Montford, about four or five. Someone will meet you there. Telegraph me from Baltimore, and write from Montebello."

He stepped down from the vestibule of the car, and waved his hand up to her in farewell; but before he had gone half the length of the car she called him back.

"Daddy, you won't forget to button the top button of your overcoat when it rains, will you? And tell Hallam if he forgets to feed his baby rabbits they will die. And tell Bunny I wish I could have brought the kitten she gave me, and——"

But the doctor, laughing, sent her back into the car. It was well for her pride that the lights in the corridor were dimmed; for tears would persist in foolishly trickling down her cheeks. Later, in her berth, she lay thinking, thinking, of the dear home life she had left, of the new life she was going to. She knew almost nothing of this Montebello; but, all the same, she had formed a rather definite idea of it. It was old, of course; and when Dad used to go there, as a young man, there was more

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or less gayety, led by the boy cousin he had visited. She had forgotten to ask who the boy cousin was, what relation he might have been to the Colonel and Miss Sophia; in fact, it was all pretty hazy—it had been so evident that Dad was reluctant to tell her very much.

Her thoughts went on and on, until—it seemed to her quite suddenly—the porter's voice was saying through the curtains of her berth—

“Balt'mer in twenty minutes, Miss!” and a narrow thread of light was coming past the window-curtains, and she laughed to realize that she had, after all, slept soundly through the night.

IV

ABOARD THE *EMMA NILES*

SYBIL was soon dressed, and by the time the train drew into the station was very wide awake indeed, and too excited to be homesick. Everyone was kind; the sleeping-car porter asked after her health and the conductor hoped she would arrive safely at her journey's end, and called a station-porter to take charge of her suit-case and find her a cab. Sybil was glad to follow him out into the freshness of the morning. She had him lead her first to the telegraph window so that she might send the promised message to Mother-dear, and next to get a bite of breakfast; then he led the way up a long flight of steps to a street, and gave her bag into the keeping of the very old, very ragged colored driver of an ancient four-wheel vehicle.

They rattled along over the cobblestones of the streets, down the hills to those just awak-

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ening to the business of the day, past the wharves with their masses of freight, until at last the driver leaned back and said:

"Dis yer's de *Emma Niles*, Miss. I'll interduce yer to de Captain!"

Sybil smiled, but the old negro opened the door of his vehicle with as grand a manner as if it were a chariot of state and he a footman to the King; then he took up her bag, and led the way toward a little group of men standing near the shipping window. One was a short, rotund, blue-uniformed individual, and behind him the old negro stopped and gave an apologetic cough which could not fail to attract attention. The rotund officer turned, and Sybil saw that he wore on his cap, in letters of somewhat tarnished gold, the word, "Captain."

He recognized the old colored man. "Well, Uncle Enoch, what you want? What you botherin' me for now?" he asked, with a face of extreme seriousness.

The old man bobbed in a queer little bow. "Please, sir, Marse Cap'n," he said, "I done brung you a young lady, sir! Dis yer's her!" He jerked the thumb of his left hand over his

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shoulder, and the Captain's twinkling eyes met Sybil's.

"Good morning, Miss," he said, lifting his cap. "If you're going on my boat I hope you'll allow me the privilege of looking after your comfort and safety!"

Sybil liked the elaborate courtesy; its evident sincerity was charming.

"I am going to a place called Montford," she said, while she paid the grinning driver, who was evidently delighted at having successfully fulfilled his trust.

"Well, now," said the Captain, "that's quite a coincidence! I don't often have two charming young ladies for Montford! I reckon I'll have to run up some extra bunting and mark this day down on the ship's log in red ink! Just as soon as we get out of the Basin, Miss, I shall be glad of your company in the pilot-house!"

It was not until an hour or two later that her curiosity concerning the pilot-house was satisfied. First the boat had to be swung around, then thread its way out of the crowded inner harbor which the Captain had called "the Basin," and past the fort on the right—which a steward told her was the one

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from which the Star Spangled Banner had so bravely floated on a memorable morning—and, at last, down the broad Chesapeake.

Then it was that a white-coated steward approached her, as she sat on the little bench that ran along the sides of the boat, well up in the bow.

"Scuse me, Miss! De Cap'n say he sends his compliments, an' say he'd be very glad of yo' comp'ny up in de pilot-house."

Sybil, all the while wondering how on earth it happened that she should be singled out for such an honor, and what the twins would say when they heard of it, and thinking how very nice sea-captains were, followed the man into the cabin and up a little narrow flight of stairs.

The Captain's cheerful voice greeted her almost before the crown of her hat rose above the top of the flight that led from the deck to the pilot-house.

"Come right along up, my dear young lady! You see you ain't the first one here!"

Then, when Sybil stood on the deck of the narrow little place that seemed so curious a mixture of nautical comfort and business, he added, "This here's the other young lady I

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was speakin' about that's also goin' to Montford. I'm pleased to make you acquainted with Miss Molly Rutherford, Miss——"

Sybil, through her surprise, found herself saying, mechanically, "I am Miss Crawford, Sybil Crawford."

The girl who was seated on the leather-covered seat against the wall of the pilot-house was openly smiling.

"The Captain makes us all acquainted," she said, and Sybil at once knew that she should like her. "We're all his sweethearts, whether we sail with him once or a hundred times!"

The jovial Captain chuckled, and turned to his work of taking the boat down the Bay, first saying, "That's right! That's right! Every young lady that comes on my boat is my sweetheart, and I look after every one the same as if she were my own daughter! Just make yourselves at home, young ladies! The boat's your own while you're aboard, from hold to pilot-house!"

"Do sit down here," Miss Rutherford said, patting the place beside her. Then, when Sybil had seated herself, she whispered, "Isn't the Captain an old darling? He's been taking these boats up and down the Bay ever since

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my mother was a girl, and he's known far and wide. There's not a father nor mother from one end of his route to another who will not allow their daughters to travel alone on the old *Emma Niles*; because, whether he knew us before or not, we are under his especial care the moment we come aboard his boat! Isn't he an old dear?"

"I have never met anyone the least bit like him!" said Sybil.

The other girl laughed. "And you were, consequently, unprepared? Well, he's the best in the world, but there are other captains on the Chesapeake nearly as dear! They are a type, like nothing else the world over, and all just splendid."

"It's delightful," said Sybil.

"You know the Bay? No? Then I must show you the sights," the other said.

They chatted on, Miss Rutherford showing her the places of interest: Annapolis; verdant Kent Island on the left; then, after dinner, the many landings, the old houses, half seen through the delicate mist of budding leaves and opening fruit-blossoms, of which Miss Rutherford knew all the names and most of the history.

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"Oh, yes," she explained, as they leaned over the railing to watch the negroes taking off the freight at one of the landings. "I know them all, just as people who live in the city know all the names of the streets! I have been away—at boarding-school and abroad—nearly as much as I have been at home; but I suppose knowing all about the places and the families was born in me. I know them as a matter of course."

After a while Miss Rutherford said, "Do you know, I see your name very often, in my brother Jack's letters from Harvard. He has a friend there—Don Crawford, the End."

Sybil flushed quickly, and her eyes sparkled. "Don! He's my brother! And you are Jack Rutherford's sister? Why, he and Donald are bosom friends, and room-mates!"

Miss Rutherford held out her hand, as if they had just met, and Sybil grasped it. "I knew I should like you!" she cried, and both laughed.

"I should think so. Don Crawford's sister! You'll have to call me by my first name, because we have only just missed knowing each other for two years! I'm Molly Rutherford."

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"Oh, I wonder if you live anywhere near where I am going?" Sybil cried.

Molly looked at her. "Captain Woollett said you were going to get off at Montford Landing, but I think he must have been mistaken."

Sybil's eyes opened wide. "But I am! I *am* going to get off at Montford!"

"Are you sure? Because that landing is only used by two places, our own Fordham and the Crocketts' Montebello!"

"Well, but that's where I am going—to Montebello, you know!"

Molly's eyes opened very wide, and a curious little shadow of change passed over her face. It was as if she were very, very much surprised, quite to the extent of being unable to hide it or to maintain her usual composure.

It was altogether so strange, so unexpected a look, that, insensibly, Sybil's heart thumped and she began to feel alarmed.

"What makes you so surprised?" she asked, leaning forward a little. "I am certainly going to Montebello; I am going to visit Colonel and Miss Crockett!"

"Visit? Visit the Crocketts?"

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“Why, yes! Is there anything remarkable in that?”

For a long moment Molly continued to stare at her as if she still were not sure of having heard aright. Then, with evident effort, she recovered her composure; and if it had seemed strange before that her look had sought Sybil's face earnestly, it was even stranger that now her eyes determinedly looked away. At last she evidently became aware of Sybil's growing alarm, and said, as if to reassure her:

“Oh, I had not thought of your visiting at Montebello. We shall be neighbors.”

But the effort to appear natural was so marked that Sybil could not let it pass quite so easily. There was a constrained silence, during which the two girls watched the passing shore; then Sybil, taking courage, turned to the other and said:

“Won't you please tell me? I am going there a stranger, and I do not know a thing of what I am to meet, except that Colonel Crockett and his sister are old, and want a young person in their house. They are cousins of my father's, and Colonel Crockett wrote to him and asked for a visit from one of his daughters, and here I am! If there is any-

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thing very strange about it, won't you please tell me?"

Molly Rutherford flushed. "I am ashamed to have been so—so stupid about showing my surprise," she said. "But if your father is a cousin of Colonel Crockett's, you and I may count on being related, too, in a way! Isn't that lovely? One of my great aunts married into that family——" and, seeing Sybil's raised eyebrows of surprise, she laughed—"and that makes us related, you know, according to the Maryland and Virginia way of reckoning!"

It did not seem necessary that she should explain that her relationship to the Crawford family was only an adopted one; somehow, since she left them, her being one of the Crawfords, one of their very own, seemed far more substantially a fact than it had even in South Wickham.

"It's a very nice way!" she laughed. "But, all the more, won't you please tell me something about Montebello? Why does my going there seem so strange? You haven't yet told me that, you know!"

Molly turned her head away and again looked over the water toward the wooded

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shores. But after a thoughtful pause she looked back at Sybil.

"Forgive me," she said, "please forgive me! I don't mean to be rude! I ought not to have seemed surprised when you told me you were going to visit there. It was a mistake on my part, and the only way I can rectify it, or partly undo it, is to say nothing else!"

"You have said nothing at all!" Sybil replied. "It is just—I don't mean to be rude, either—it is just your not saying anything that makes me think there must be something strange about Montebello or the Crocketts!"

Molly drew a deep breath and shook her head. "It was very wrong of me, very foolish, very—*gauche!* But if I say anything at all I might give you a wrong impression; and as you are really going there, that would not be fair, would it? Nor kind?"

Sybil had grown a little pale, as she did whenever she was excited or troubled. "Are you sure—please forgive me, but are you sure that you are not doing that anyway?"

Then Molly seemed to rally all her tact and kindness, and, by an effort that was evidently great, her usual manner; she even laughed. "Oh dear," she said, "I think I am

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giving you a very wrong impression indeed! And all I meant was not to give you any at all!"

"I am beginning to think Colonel Crockett must be an ogre—and I have not brought a beanstalk with me! I won't be able to run away!" Sybil tried to speak lightly, but there was an unusual feeling of fear or dread at her heart; and try as she would she could not quite keep her lips from trembling.

But Molly laughed. "Oh, he isn't an ogre! There, I may as well say it! I really don't know *what* he is! His place is next to Grandfather's, and, as I said, there are ties of relationship between our families; but really, the people in the county do not see very much of him, and he does not have any guests. Won't you please, ple-e-ease believe that is all I know?"

"Why, yes," Sybil replied, a little coldly. "If you say so. Will you tell me the name of the white house we can see through that orchard?"

But poor Molly groaned. "Oh, Oh, what does make me so unutterably stupid?" she wailed. "I have offended you, and you think I am a wretch!" Impulsively she put an arm

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about Sybil. "Look here! We really *are* cousins, you know, in an ever-so-distant way; and I think I can dimly remember hearing Grandfather mention a Mr. Crawford who used to be down here sometimes. Our place is next to Montebello, and Mamma and Jack and I live there with Grandfather, my father's father, when we are home. Now, if you ever, ever need Grandfather, or me either, or get lonely at Montebello, or anything, I promise you, both for Grandfather and myself, that we will come to the Colonel's at any minute of day or night you send for us. Will you remember that?"

Her earnestness was so evident and so honest, that, although her own fears were really increased by it, Sybil was none the less touched. It was good, at any rate, to have made a friend who would be near at hand. "I will remember it," she said, pressing Molly's hand, "And I knew I should like you!"

They laughed, relieved at the ending of the strange little scene; perhaps their thoughts remained on the subject, but both made a brave effort to appear as if it were forgotten.

Molly chattered gayly, and everything she said was of interest to Sybil. The boat ran

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nearer the shores as it drew farther down the Bay, stopping often at the wharves which Molly called "landings," and threaded its way up and down the inlets or rivers where the tides rose and fell, and where orchards, and fields that would later be verdant with oats or corn, came down almost to the water's edge. The little steamer went on for an hour or so, past low shores with growths of pine and orchards of pink bloom. At last, it turned sharply into a rather wide inlet.

Molly stood up with a flush on her face. "This is home!" she said. "This inlet is Cherry-pit Creek, and all that land on our left is Montebello. Look! Look through those pines! There are some of the buildings—you can't see the house from this side. Our own Fordham is farther up. There—do you see that tiny house up there? That's the wharf! And that roof away to the left? That's the Hermit's!"

"Who is the Hermit?" Sybil asked.

Molly shook her head. "No one knows! I don't know anyone who has ever seen him. That will be a mystery for you to unravel."

Sybil laughed, remembering the twins and their longing for the mysterious; but in a

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minute or two the boat turned toward the little landing, as like half a dozen others they had already passed as if all were made on one pattern. The Captain came down from the bridge toward them.

"Well, young ladies! I hope you have had a pleasant sail, and I hope I may have the honor of yo' company many times again. The little ol' *Emma Niles* is proud to carry such charmin' freight!"

Molly laughed. "Captain, have you ever been in Ireland?" she asked.

The Captain shook his finger at her. "Ah! Now you're referring to that Blarney Stone I've heard tell of! A-a-a-h! No, Miss! The good ol' Chesapeake's enough of a sail for me! An' jest let me tell you, we don't need any Irishmen to come along an' tell us what to whisper in the ears of the pretty girls!"

He chuckled delightedly at his own humor, and the girls laughed. Molly was quite unabashed at his teasing. "Mind you keep all the best speeches for me, Captain!" she laughingly warned him.

The Captain put his head on one side, and seemed to consider. "Well, now, I wouldn't like to stir up any jealous feelin's amongst

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the others, Miss Molly!" Then, as if he feared Sybil might be feeling rather left out, he turned to her with a little bow. "I hope you will some day be patronizing our ol' *Emma Niles* again, my dear young lady."

Molly answered for her. "Miss Crawford is going to visit at Montebello, Captain Woollett," she said.

Sybil's heart gave a leap as she saw the Captain look quickly at Molly as if to make sure that she had spoken in earnest; it was quite evident that he, too, saw something unusual in the fact of her going to Montebello. But he had his feelings, whatever they might be, under better control than Molly. After the first glance, the first expression of surprise, he turned to Sybil with a smile.

"Indeed! Goin' to visit at Montebello! Well, well! It's been a right smart o' time since I laid eyes on the Colonel, or Miss Sophia either! I hope you'll find them both enjoyin' the best of health, Miss, and will tender them Captain Woollett's best regards. I daresay Miss Sophia's as charmin' as ever!"

In spite of his good intentions Sybil was sure she could detect something curious in his manner. She had not time for further specu-

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lation, however; and, indeed, the crowding of emotions—wonder, curiosity, and a touch of homesickness and uneasiness—would have made it too difficult for her to ask another question. They had come to the wharf and Molly had run to the companion-way; there the Captain and Sybil found her excitedly jumping up and down and waving both hands at a tall and stately white-haired gentleman on the wharf; and as soon as the gangway had been run out she was across and in his arms. The Captain helped Sybil down, and greeted the white-haired gentleman.

“Good evenin’, Major Rutherford, sir,” he said, shaking him heartily by the hand. “I brought your young lady down safely to you, sir, as you see!”

“Trust you for that, Captain,” Mr. Rutherford said. Then he looked at Sybil, as if he ought to know her, but could not, somehow, quite place her; afterwards Sybil remembered the look on his face, and it seemed to her that it was one almost of fright.

“This is Miss Sybil Crawford, Grandfather,” Molly introduced her, “and she is going to visit Colonel and Miss Crockett.”

Mr. Rutherford took Sybil’s hand, and

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looked down at her with drawn brows. "Miss—Sybil—Crawford!" he repeated, emphasizing the first name, and dwelling upon the whole of it as if it amazed him. "Miss—Sybil—Crawford! And going to visit at Montebello! Well, well! Your name recalls many things to me, my dear young lady! I think I used to know your father—Bob Crawford—didn't I?"

At the mention of the beloved name, and the memory of all it meant, Sybil felt her eyes smart as if tears were very near. It was really most trying to have everybody look at her so queerly, and seem so surprised that she should be there!

"Father used to stay here a good deal when he was a boy, I think, sir," she said.

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Rutherford, but in a tone that sounded strangely sad. "He did indeed, with——! And he named his little girl Sybilla! Well, well, well!"

Sybil felt that if anybody else looked at her in that way she should certainly burst into tears; but fortunately the jovial Captain had to bid them farewell. He shook hands with Mr. Rutherford again, then took off his cap and held it stiffly in front of him, while,

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with his heels together, he made the quaintest little formal, dancing-school bows to Sybil and Molly.

"I regret to bid you farewell, young ladies! May your days be full of joy and your nights of pleasant dreams!"

Then, evidently satisfied that the properties had been suitably attended to, he dropped his unwonted formality and returned to his usual jolly manner. "And if either of you young ladies thinks of elopin' one of these days, the good little ol' *Emma Niles* and her Captain will be at the young gentleman's service!"

With that he chuckled, tremendously pleased with his own pleasantry, which had probably been used on many another occasion, stepped briskly up the gang-way, and in a moment the bell from the pilot-house showed that he had returned to his post of duty.

Sybil looked after the boat with dancing eyes. "Oh, I do think he's the funniest, dearest old gentleman I ever saw in all my life!" she said.

Mr. Rutherford joined in Molly's laugh.

"He's a great character, is the Captain," he said, "known from one end of the Bay to the other; and there's not a soul along the shores

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but would trust him with their last penny! And if I had to be on the Bay in a fog or a thunderstorm or even a tornado, I'd rather be with Captain Woollett than anyone else I know!"

Then he turned again to Sybil. "Well, Miss Sybil, I see the Montebello carriage out yonder, and Molly and I are going to put you safely into it!"

He led the way past the little wharf-house, and behind it to where two carriages and an open wagon were waiting. Molly's trunk was already in the wagon; and the drivers of the carriages touched their hats with their whips. To Sybil's wonder, the Rutherfords led her to the second carriage, to which was harnessed the most beautiful pair of horses she had ever seen. As her grandfather was about to open the door for Sybil, Molly touched him on the arm, and said, in a tone so low that the negroes could not hear:

"Grandfather, I have promised Sybil for you and myself that if she should ever want us—get lonely, or anything—and send for us, we will go to her!"

Mr. Rutherford exchanged a quick, queer little look with Molly, and then said, "Cer-

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tainly, my dear. That was just right." And, after a moment's pause, he added, "And Molly and I will give ourselves the pleasure of calling on Miss Sophia and yourself before many days."

"Oh, please do," Sybil said, quickly. It made her happier to feel that there was something she could count upon and look forward to; for her fears and dread were increasing as she came nearer to Montebello. "Please come to see me, and do come soon!"

Then, almost before she could wave good-bye, the carriage door had been closed, and the horses had started. She was off for the unknown!

V

SYBILLA

IN those days between the arrival of Colonel Crockett's first letter and her departure for Montebello, Sybil, through all her loneliness and the choke of parting from the family, had been upheld by the consciousness of her self-sacrifice, by the thought that she should be able to prove herself a worthy daughter of the Crawfords' training, and that she was going to be of service, perhaps very unpleasant and difficult service, to two old people who needed her; and there is always a satisfaction that accompanies self-sacrifice.

But gradually, because of Molly Rutherford's amazement and determined silence, Captain Woollett's expression when he heard of her visit to Montebello, and Major Rutherford's words and looks, her satisfaction had given place to a feeling of real uneasiness, if not of actual dread. All her life she had been

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fearless; her companionship with the boys had made her that. But this new dread was of something mysterious, something she could not see, could not touch, could not find out about. It was not pleasant; and when the door of the carriage closed, and she found herself embarked on the last part of her journey, her heart was beating painfully, and for a fleeting instant she wished she might escape, run back to the boat and the friendly Captain, back to Dad and Mother-dear and the beloved home in South Wickham.

But Sybil came of a courageous race, a race which had helped to win the wilderness for the nation, to make of it a land of smiling plenty and of ease and safety; a race which had given its sons to battle, often to meet death in the face, and its daughters to that greater agony of waiting bravely at home. After her first inevitable pangs of doubt and wonder and fear, her usual courage returned, and she began to take note—first of the carriage, then of the country she was being driven through.

At last the horses passed between the tall stone posts of a gateway, and were trotting swiftly up a winding road through what

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seemed to Sybil a veritable forest of oaks. She had never seen such trees, almost as large of girth as the elms on the village street at home, their great round boles seemingly all of one size. Then, through the glade, she saw a gleam of white, and her heart leaped again. She was there!

The "great house" of Montebello had been, in its day, one of the famous show-places of the rich old South. It was white, and there stretched across its front a broad, stone-paved portico whose roof was supported on massive white pillars; beautifully carved white railings followed every turn and lift of roof; and at its back was a grove of oaks, while many acres of lawn stretched before it; and from all of its front windows could be seen the gleaming waters of the Chesapeake. Sybil was almost breathless at its unexpected beauty and grandeur!

When the carriage drew up before the central door—for there were three in the front of the house—several people stood there awaiting her—an aged negro man-servant, a colored maid in neat print dress and snowy, capacious apron, and the dearest little old lady

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in the world. At least, that is the description she afterward wrote Donald.

When Sybil stepped down from the carriage, Miss Sophia fluttered forward. All her movements were quick, bird-like flutterings; her little hands, her head, her tripping feet never moved slowly. Now she was trembling with excitement, her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were bright with tears. She put her hands on Sybil's arms, and looked up into her face.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!" she said. "I am so glad you were willing to come!"

Then she stood on tiptoe, and gave Sybil a timid, pecking little kiss on the cheek.

"You are Miss Sophia," Sybil said, "and I am Sybil."

Miss Sophia looked up at her quickly, timidly, and then as quickly over her shoulder, as if she feared someone might hear. "Sybil! You are Sybil? Your name is—Sybil?"

Sybil could not restrain a smile. "Why, yes," she said, "I am Sybil Crawford, you know!"

Little Miss Sophia was nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. She looked up again into Sybil's face, and laughed. "Yes,

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yes, of course," she said, almost apologetically. "I—I think Cousin Robert forgot to mention your name. And it is—Sybil?"

She had a quaint little way of putting her head on one side when she asked a question that was unfailingly diverting.

Sybil laughed; she wanted to take the dear little old lady in her arms and give her a reassuring hug, although it seemed absurd that she should really be as timid as she looked, here in broad daylight, with the sun gleaming on the marble flags of the Montebello portico, and people all about. Insensibly Sybil's own fears and doubts and misgivings had vanished as completely as if they had been dreams!

Miss Sophia seemed to recall her duties as hostess, and gave another queer, timid little start. "You have come a long way, my dear," she said, as if she were greatly impressed with the magnitude of Sybil's journey. Little Miss Sophia was, as Sybil very soon found out, impressed with everything which lay beyond her own experience. "You have come a ve-ry long way! And all to keep two old people company! Oh, I was so glad"—Miss Sophia again clasped her little hands in front of her—"I was so ve-ry glad when dear Brother

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asked Cousin Robert to let you visit us. We have not had a visitor for——”

Then she stopped, as if the sound of the words had alarmed her again, and once more looked over her shoulder as if afraid of someone who might be listening.

“But you must be ve-ry tired, my dear,” she said, “and I must take you up to your room to rest. I know all young ladies like rest!”

Sybil followed her, but laughed. “Oh, no, indeed, Miss Sophia,” she said. “We do not like rest when we have just come to a place. We want to get acquainted first!”

Then Miss Sophia turned in the doorway, evidently a little distressed. “Acquainted—Oh, yes, my dear. I hope we shall be very well acquainted, ve-ry well indeed! And dear Brother hopes so, too, and is so ve-ry sorry that his gout is bad to-day. He would have come out to meet you if his gout had not been so very, ve-ry bad; but he will give himself the pleasure of seeing you at supper. And I will take you to your room—to rest!”

Sybil smiled, and followed Miss Sophia into the high, cool hall which, like the portico, was paved with squares of white stone, and

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seemed to Sybil, accustomed to the crowded coziness of the doctor's house, very cold and un-homelike. It had a high-arched ceiling, enormous doors and windows, and book-cases built into the walls, with the books all forbiddingly closed behind glass doors. A broad staircase went up from one side, and the colored maid was already mounting the steps with Sybil's bag. Miss Sophia followed, but when they were half way up something happened, and the little lady stopped, wavered, and turned, trembling and pale.

Sybil was too surprised to move or speak. A thundering, stentorian call had sounded through the house, coming apparently from one of the rooms below, a roar that seemed completely to fill every inch of space, to make the very air tremble, to echo and re-echo from every corner of the hall and stairway. The syllables that floated forth on that mighty current of sound were:

"So—phi—a!"

Miss Sophia's poor little hands were wringing each other nervously, and her curls were shaking.

"O dear, O dear! I think perhaps dear Brother must want me!" she said.

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And with no further explanation, she tripped down stairs as quickly as a child, and trotted across the hall in the direction the sound had come from! She reminded Sybil, for all the world, of the White Rabbit trotting off in search of his gloves, and saying, "Oh, the Duchess, the Duchess! Oh! Won't she be savage if I've kept her waiting!" and she scarcely knew whether she felt more like laughter or dismay.

There was nothing to do but follow the maid, who was standing at the top of the stairs looking badly frightened. Sybil longed to question her, but felt that she could not quite do anything like that; and the maid only said, as she opened the door of a bedroom:

"De Colonel sure has got de gout rale bad to-day."

It occurred to Sybil that the Colonel had something more than the gout, something in the way of a temper! She was beginning to wonder whether the old gentleman's peculiarities might not have had something to do with the way Molly and the Captain and even Major Rutherford had looked at her when they heard she was going to visit him. Her reception had been curious enough, and she

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laughed a little to herself as she recalled her thought of taking care of these old people, perhaps of having to wait upon them! There seemed to be servants enough for a dozen, instead of two; it occurred to her that to do anything for the Colonel might be even more of a task than she had foreseen. She remembered what Donald had called him, that day when his letter had caused Mother-dear to turn so pale; she could not help feeling that perhaps the old gentleman was all Don had feared, and more, in the way of being disagreeable.

But, once in her new room, there was too much else to take up her thoughts to permit of their dwelling longer on her unseen host. The very rugs on the floor, the fine old mahogany furniture—the four-post bed with tasseled canopy of white, the dressing-table with its quaint little bandy legs and claw-feet gripping mahogany balls, the little round table with similar feet and the daintiest of carved crusts around its edge, the square-seated chairs upholstered in needlework and old silk, and the bureau with its swinging shaving mirror—just these things, she knew, would bring enough money at Mr. Cossett's antique

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shop in South Wickham completely to refurnish the dear, shabby old gray house at home. It was plain that whatever she was to find at Montebello, it would not be poverty. She wondered why on earth the Colonel should have sent for one of the young Crawfords, when he could surely have had the company of anyone in the neighborhood. There must be plenty of young people in the many houses she had seen from the boat; why had he not invited some of those, instead of an unknown "female" relative from Massachusetts? While she was puzzling over it, and taking the things out of her suit-case, there came a timid little knock on the door, and Miss Sophia's voice spoke her name.

Sybil ran to open the door. "I was hoping you would come," she said. "This is the most beautiful bedroom I ever saw, Miss Sophia, and the view of the Bay from my window is lovely, perfectly lovely!"

Miss Sophia's cheeks were slightly flushed, but evidently she was not going to refer to her brother's stentorian call. "I am so glad you like it, my dear," she said. "And I think you should call me Cousin Sophia—we *are* cousins, you know."

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Sybil felt suddenly that perhaps she ought to confess her merely adopted relationship; but then she realized that Dad would have told, if he had wished it known; so she bent and kissed the flushed, sweet, little old face.

"Cousin Sophia! Oh, I shall feel more at home if I may call you that!"

Mrs. Crawford had folded in the bottom of Sybil's suit-case a simple white crêpe dress, as being one that she could properly wear on her first evening, in whatever circumstances she might find the Crocketts. Miss Sophia hovered over everything that Sybil had unpacked, examining each article with the frank interest of a child, and with as little thought of impropriety. The little white dress especially attracted her. She clasped her hands ecstatically.

"Oh, my dear! Will you wear this to-night?" she begged.

Sybil smiled as she lifted it up and put it over her head. "I was going to," she said. "Mother-dear thought it would do."

"Oh, it is going to be so very, ve-ry nice to have a young girl in the house!" Miss Sophia looked behind her in her nervous little way. "It—it has sometimes been—just a little bit—

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lonely, my dear!" she whispered, and nodded confidentially.

"But there are young people in the neighborhood, are there not?" Sybil suggested, fastening her belt the while. "I met a delightful girl coming down on the boat who lives quite near—Molly Rutherford."

She was totally unprepared for the immediate change in Miss Sophia; the brightness vanished at once from the eager little face, and the hands began clasping and unclasping, nervously twisting over each other. Sybil turned from her mirror, and was about to exclaim, to ask what she had said that was alarming, when once more through the house, seeming to rise from its very foundations, to fill every corner, to echo and re-echo through room and corridor, came that mighty roar:

"So—phi—a!"

Miss Sophia turned, and fairly scuttled from the room; Sybil heard her little feet pattering down the hall, down the uncarpeted stairway, and her voice calling:

"I am coming, Brother! I am coming! O dear, O dear! Yes, Brother, I am coming!" while the roars continued until a door below opened and closed!

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Sybil sat down on the side of her bed, and laughed and laughed again. It was all too ludicrous, too grotesque, for words! She was tired and hungry, and nervously tried by the varied experiences of the day. She had expected to come to a house perhaps of poverty, certainly one where her services should be needed by the two old and lonely people who had sent their call northward over so many miles to Dad. Instead, here she was in the finest bedroom she had ever seen, in a house that would make half a dozen of "home"; there were servants everywhere, and evidences of wealth and comfort all about. And as for the two old people—one, indeed, was timid, yet far too sprightly to be in need of waiting on; while the other—well, the other seemed to be more like a roaring lion than the lonely old man she had expected to meet.

Again she wondered why she was here, when the Colonel could have had the companionship of dozens of young people from the nearby places, merely by inviting them!

"But perhaps he roars at them, and they will not come," she said to herself; and, almost hysterically, she buried her head in the ruffled pillow and laughed until she was near to tears.

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Then she jumped up, for a muffled gong was being sounded from the hall below. "Gracious! Perhaps that's for supper, and I'm not half ready!"

Her scramble reminded her of many a morning at home, and a great lump of homesickness was in her throat as she descended the broad stairway to the hall. A mahogany door at one side was open, but all she could see of the room beyond was a tall leather-covered screen. There was no doubt of its being the dining-room, however, for from within came the sound of a man's voice—the voice of the roars—berating first some one named "Shem," then "Jinny," then, and most frequently, "Sophia!"

Sybil waited outside the door, scarcely knowing whether or not she was expected to enter, and, indeed, scarcely daring to do so, when she heard Miss Sophia's voice raised in gentle protest.

"Oh, Brother, it *is* the very same coffee! I assure you it is! I sent to Baltimore for the ve-ry——"

Something—doubtless a fist—thumped on the table, and the roaring voice thundered:

"It is not! I tell you it is not coffee at

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all! It's beans, or chicory, or anything, but it's not coffee! Never was coffee! Never will be coffee! Take the stuff away—you Shem, what you standing there like a log o' wood for? Hey? You Jinny!"

And again from Miss Sophia, as something fell to the floor and broke, "Oh, Brother! I *ordered* the ve-ry same——"

Sybil scarcely knew whether to stay or to rush back up the stairs to the safety of her own room; then she raised her head and pressed her lips very closely together.

"I know what's the matter with *him*!" she said to herself. "He's in just the sort of temper a child is in when it bangs its head upon the floor! He's roaring and raging just to hear himself, and just to see people jump around! He is not going to make *me* jump! *I* know what he needs! He needs just what any spoiled child needs, a firm—personal—touch!"

Then she laughed at the absurdity of the thought. She could not very well chastise this unknown lion of a Colonel! "But I can *deal* with him, just the same," she said to herself, with a little nod of confidence, and went into the dining-room.

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Miss Sophia sat at the end of the broad, gleaming mahogany table, facing the door, and well entrenched behind a formidable array of silver urn and coffee-pot, and various bowls and pitchers of silver, all placed upon a large oval tray. Sybil wrote Donald afterwards that Miss Sophia doubtless, at times, needed all the barriers she could erect!

A many-branched silver candelabrum with lighted candles was in the middle of the table, which was without a cloth, but very well covered with dishes. "Three or four kinds of preserves and four kinds of hot breads, Don," she wrote afterwards. "Wouldn't Hallam and the girls enjoy it? And I know a sophomore or two who would not altogether despise it!"

But the center of interest in the room, the person who, by voice and gesture, was holding the attention of the negro man and woman, and of the trembling, fidgitting little lady opposite him, was seated with his back to the door, well protected from the draught by the leather screen.

When the Colonel heard his young guest come into the room, or else was made aware of her being there by Miss Sophia's look of relief and welcome, and her gently reproving

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murmur of "Brother! Oh, Brother!" the roars subsided, the pounding ceased, and lo! where there had been a storm a beautiful calm prevailed! His guest had come, and gout or no gout, supper or no supper, cost what it might and doubtless would of pain and inconvenience, the Colonel was going to welcome her properly at last!

Sybil lingered back of him, out of his sight; indeed, she scarcely dared come closer; but the old gentleman spoke, and how charming now was his tone!

"Ah, my dear young lady! Come in, come in! I regret that my infirmity has prevented my welcoming you before, but the welcome is none the less sincere and hearty for the delay!" Then, as Sybil still hung back a little, "Come in, my dear!"

All the while the old gentleman was struggling to arise, lifting himself up slowly and carefully by the arms of his high-backed chair, waving away Shem's proffered arm, until, leaning against the table for support, he was upon his feet.

"Come in, my dear," said Miss Sophia, peeping between the enormous hot-water urn and the sugar-bowl. "Come right in!"

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Sybil walked the few yards to the table, around the Colonel's chair, and at last stood before him.

The effort of rising, and doubtless the exercise of roaring, had made the old gentleman's face a deep, rich crimson. He turned to Sybil with a little formal, old-fashioned bow, and held out his hand.

"It was very good of you to come to keep two old people company," he said, as she was advancing.

But when at last she had come out of the shadows into the full candle-light, and he really saw her face for the first time, his sentence remained unfinished. He stood for a long moment as motionless as if suddenly turned to stone; his outstretched arm fell, his hand struck the edge of the table without his being aware of it; and slowly, very slowly, the deep color paled from his face, leaving it white, terrifyingly white, with strange shadows cast by the flickering candles. The old negro sprang forward, and Miss Sophia rose, alarmed, from behind her entrenchment; Sybil stood speechless and motionless with fright, staring at the paling face before her.

At last, after what seemed an age of time

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but was probably scarcely a minute, the Colonel drew a deep breath, leaned suddenly forward across the corner of the table, toward her, and gasped out the name:

"Sybilla!"

At the quick relief of hearing her own name, instead of some unknown, unimaginable horror, Sybil felt the blood returning to her face in a wave of color. She lifted her head, and returned his look bravely.

"Why, yes, Colonel Crockett, I am Sybilla! Sybil Crawford, you know!"

While Miss Sophia and Shem and Jinny remained transfixed with fright or amazement, and the Colonel still bent toward her with a look as of one seeing a vision, she gave a little laugh. Anything to break the tension of the curious situation!

"I suppose Dad forgot to tell you which of us was coming!" she said, deprecatingly. "It was I who came, you see, because I am the oldest!"

Then, the Colonel still looking at her in that strange way, she cried out, "Oh, *what* is there in my name that seems so remarkable to everybody?"

At last the Colonel moved. "Sybilla!" he



"Sybilla."

SYBILLA

said again, in a low tone of wonder, of incredulity.

Sybil's endurance and patience were at an end. Suddenly she wanted to slap the old gentleman, or to shake him! But she could not very well do that! Instead, she stamped her foot, and shook her head directly at him, never realizing until hours later how inexpressibly rude she had been.

"Yes, Sybilla! Sybilla, Sybilla, Sybilla! There!" she cried.

It was a shocking little exhibition of temper, but the atmosphere seemed suddenly to clear. Miss Sophia sat down and laughed nervously. Shem grinned and jumped toward the pantry, and Jinny, her white teeth gleaming, drew out the chair at Sybil's place.

The Colonel's color began to come back, and he held out his hand again. He was actually smiling.

"My dear Sybilla! You must forgive an old man who is heartily ashamed of his nerves! Why, I might have been Sophia there, behaving like a fidgetty woman!"

But Sybil was not to be so easily appeased. "Cousin Sophia didn't take me for a ghost, anyway!" she said, sharply. But perhaps she

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was not altogether unreasonable in being angry at such a remarkable reception; and all day long, it seemed to her, people had been exclaiming, "Sybilla!" and gasping. No, she was not unreasonable at all—as she argued it out later in her letter to Donald.

The Colonel smiled. "Ah! Not a ghost, my child, but a vision! A vision we are not accustomed to at Montebello—a vision of youth! A vision of youth!" He sank back in his chair, and waved her to her own place at the table.

"I think we have been needing you here for a long time, my dear," he added, and for the remainder of the meal there was not even the echo of a roar!

VI

THE FIRST MORNING

WHEN Sybil came down to breakfast on her first morning at Montebello, she found the Colonel standing at the dining-room window looking toward his stables, and calling and whistling to some dogs outside. His gout seemed miraculously to have disappeared during the night; he turned as she came into the room, and said, with a stately little bow:

"Ah, my dear, you are looking as fresh as a rose! Not tired after your journey?"

Sybil smiled. "Good morning, Colonel Crockett! No, sir, I am not at all tired—I have never been tired in my life!"

The Colonel drew his white brows together into a ferocious frown. "'Colonel Crockett,' eh? Who told you to call me 'Colonel Crockett,' Miss? Hey?"

Sybil laughed. He was really very amusing, with his babyish tempers, for all his

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frowns and his roars. "May I call you 'Cousin,' then? I say 'Cousin Sophia,' you know!"

"Oh, you do, hey? You say 'Cousin Sophia,' do you? I suppose you like Sophia better than me, hey?"

Sybil put her head on one side and seemed to be thinking it over. "Well, sir, I—Cousin Sophia is a—a little more—gentle!"

The Colonel's frown was tremendous, and his voice increased to a roar. "Oh, she is, is she? I suppose she's more agreeable, too, hey?"

"Yes, sir!" said Sybil, dimpling.

The old gentleman stared at her for a moment or two; then he gasped out, "Well, bless my soul!"

But Sybil smiled at him reassuringly. "Oh, I think you *could* be *very* agreeable, if you really put your mind to it," she said.

The Colonel gasped as if someone had thrown cold water at him. Sybil looked demurely down at her own hands. She dared not look at the old gentleman; his expression of dismay and incredulity would, she knew, be too much for her. She gave him time to compose his feelings, whatever they might be,

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and was rather surprised when he said, with a chuckle :

"I shall get ahead of Sophia, anyway! You are to call me 'Uncle,' Miss, 'Uncle'—no 'Cousin' for me, remember, but 'Uncle!' D'ye hear me?"

"Yes—Uncle!"

"And you can keep on calling Sophia 'Cousin,' d'ye hear?"

Sybil had to remain speechless, or laugh; and it would have been heartless to laugh.

After a moment the old gentleman said, still in a tone of pique, "I suppose you think me a sort of ogre, hey?"

Sybil looked up at him and shook her head. "O dear, no!" she said. "I see through *you* perfectly!"

The Colonel's calm vanished. "What?" he roared, and Shem poked his head in the pantry door, while Miss Sophia's pattering footsteps could be heard hastening, as usual, toward the sound. But Sybil only continued to smile serenely.

"Yes, indeed," she assured him, "I see through you perfectly! You try to make everybody afraid of you, and then the more

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they tremble the more they provoke you to wrath."

For an instant the Colonel seemed to be choking, and his face grew alarmingly red. "So you—see—through—me—*through me*, do you, Miss? You see through me? You do, hey? And they provoke me to wrath, do they? Wrath! Wrath! I never was angry in my life, Miss! D'ye hear? Wrath!"

Sybil only looked at him, her expression unchanged, although she was longing to laugh.

"I suppose you'll be telling me next that you aren't afraid of me, hey?" he roared, glaring at her from beneath his brows.

Miss Sophia was standing outside the door, peeping around the corner of the leather screen, and Sybil was sure she was wringing her hands. The situation was ridiculous, but something told her that it was the crucial moment of her life here; and she kept reminding herself that if the old gentleman acted like a spoiled baby he had best be treated as one—as far as she could manage to do it!

She held her head a trifle higher, and the color deepened in her cheeks. "I never was afraid of anything in my life!" she declared.

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"I am certainly not going to be afraid of a spoiled child!"

But in the awful silence which followed her daring, she was, nevertheless, somewhat frightened. What if she had gone too far! What would, what could the Colonel do? The atmosphere of the room seemed to vibrate as if charged with electricity—or was it only throbbing in unison with her heart? What *would* the Colonel do?

As it happened, he did the unexpected. "A spoiled child!" he began to repeat to himself, in a low voice, as if to make sure those were the words he had heard. "A spoiled child! Well, bless my soul and body! A spoiled child!" He began to chuckle. "A spoiled child, and she's not afraid of me!"

Then the old gentleman laughed, until he had to grope blindly for a chair and throw himself into its support. He laughed until he had to use his bright bandanna to mop his eyes. He laughed until Miss Sophia's pale little face was peeping from around one side of the leather screen, a group of wondering, frightened brown ones around the other, and Shem's, blackest and most agonized of all, through the pantry door, his eyes rolling and

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his mouth open. But the old Colonel still laughed, and looked at Sybil, standing now rather ashamed and blushing and dimpling before him, and laughed again until the echoes rang, repeating, when he could :

"I'm a spoiled child!" only to laugh again!

At last, with one hand to his aching side and the other mopping away with the bandanna, he called out, "Sophia! Come around from behind that screen, and behave like a sensible woman! I'm a spoiled child, Sophia, and you needn't be afraid of me! Oh, ho, ho, ho!"

Miss Sophia came, wringing her hands and shaking her head reproachfully at Sybil. "Oh, Brother, pray compose yourself! Oh, Brother, pray don't excite yourself like this! O dear, O dear!"

The Colonel sat up very straight in his chair and frowned at her. "Sophia," he demanded, "how many years has it been since I've laughed like this?"

"Oh, Brother! I'm sure I don't know!"

"Neither do I," said the Colonel, as if a matter of importance were quite settled. He shook his finger at the very demure Sybil. "You saucy piece! So you see through me, do you? Hey?"

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"Perfectly," she replied, trying not to smile, although her deepening dimples rather gave her away.

"And you're not afraid of me? Hey?"

She shook her head.

"Not afraid of anything in the world, hey?"

"I can't imagine the sensation!" she declared, although she was quite aware of slightly stretching the truth.

"Can't, hey? Maybe you'd like to feel it?"

She put her head on one side and smiled at him very sweetly. "Well," she said, "well—Uncle—I have always enjoyed new sensations!"

"Sophia," said the Colonel impressively, "that chit of a girl is giving me a dare!"

Sybil laughed, but poor little Miss Sophia was utterly bewildered by the scene, and wrung her hands. "Oh, Brother!" she cried. "Oh, Sybil! O dear! O dear!"

"Yes, Sophia, it is undoubtedly a dare!" He chuckled again, and urged his chair toward the breakfast table with sundry jerks and pulls. "Well, young lady, we shall see, we shall see! Shem! You Shem! Bring in that breakfast! What you waiting in that

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pantry for, you lazy, no 'count rascal, you? Hey?"

When breakfast was over the Colonel asked Sybil whether she should like to explore the house; and accordingly he led her upstairs and down, through every door and into every room, save one.

"May as well know where you are," he told her. "I reckon young people haven't changed much since my day, and I used to think it necessary to know every corner of every place I stayed in."

But Sybil guessed that his apparent indifference was in reality the cloak of a very different feeling. The old house was a beautiful relic of Colonial times, originally well planned, on dignified, graceful lines; and generations had come and passed and left their mark upon it. Everything that man touches with the hand of love—fields, houses, animals—gives back a return in beauty and charm—and the old house of Montebello was far from being an exception. Even the faded needlework on the seats of the chairs, the embroidered and knitted spreads on the beds, and the other examples of old-time fancy work

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that would have been homely enough but for the evidence they gave of the love that had gone into their creation—even these were now beautiful, and lent an old-time elegance to the rooms. The varied life of generations had been lived here, and many traces of it remained. Sons and daughters had come, had played and dreamt, and gone out into the world, some to other homes, some to battle and death, some to be lost in the obscurity of time. Now there remained only two old people; and when Sybil had passed through room after room, all with that indefinable loneliness that often seems to linger in rooms long unoccupied, like the fragrance of dead roses in an old jar, she could well understand why the Colonel had broken his silence of years to beg for youthful companionship, even while she still wondered why he had not sought it nearer home. But Sybil was young, and she had not yet begun to feel the inextinguishable appeal of kindred. She could not know how deeply rooted is that call in the human race. She could not know that it had reached the old gentleman through his loneliness, and that he had responded to one of the primitive impulses of human nature when

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he had sent for someone of his own family, rather than for a stranger.

Nor could she know that as he led her from room to room of the old house he was still marvelling at the resemblance that had almost stunned him the night before. He tried to trace it through his nephew Robert, but at last he could only assure himself that it was no more than a curious coincidence. Yet all the while, whenever he looked at Sybil's face, he was shaken and stirred as he had not been for years. The resemblance was so moving, so unforeseen! It was wonderful; and there would have been wonder enough without that, in merely having a young creature of his own race beside him, in his care, to be his cherished guest for a while at least. He was beginning to find his experiment interesting!

To Sybil the matter of first importance, the first thing in her thoughts, was the delight she felt in the beautiful old house and in the little stories the old gentleman told her about his forebears who had dwelt here, and who were, as far as he knew, also her own.

The library in the left wing was the most beautiful as well as the most interesting room of all, filled to the ceiling with books or pic-

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tures—portraits by Stuart and Peale, a large engraving of Washington's inauguration, another of one of Mrs. Madison's receptions, and a yellowed photograph, hanging beside the Colonel's secretary, of a bearded man in Confederate uniform, of whom the Colonel spoke in a tone of reverence and affection as "Robert."

There was only one door in the house which the Colonel did not open for her. It was in the wall beside the library chimney.

"That unopened door, my dear, is to remain closed," the old gentleman said, when he noticed her looking towards it.

Sybil flushed a little. "Oh, I didn't mean to look inquisitive, Uncle," she said.

A strong liking for the old man had grown up during the morning; he had been so kind and courteous, and was so evidently trying to make her feel at home.

The Colonel patted her on the shoulder. "That is the door of memory, my dear," he said, in a tone so sad that Sybil looked quickly up into his face. "The door of memory, my child; and it is best to leave it unopened."

Moved by some quick impulse of pity or sympathy for she knew not what, Sybil laid

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her hand upon his arm. The old gentleman took it in his own, turned it over, and looked at it as if it were some unusual object; patted it, and released it with a sigh.

"Strange! Strange!" he murmured, as he led the way out of the library.

The big front door of Montebello stood wide open, day and night, from the first mild warmth of spring until frosty nights and chilly mornings urged old Shem to close it. It would have surprised anyone there, even timid Miss Sophia, if it had been suggested that there might be any other reason for closing it than to keep the house warm. The old square hall, Sybil thought, was sadly in need of a good tidying; there was a small forest of walking sticks and fishing rods and guns and umbrellas in one corner beside the door, and there were bridles, coats, shawls, dog collars and a variety of other things wherever the Colonel had happened to drop them. Later Miss Sophia confided to Sybil that no one dared tidy the hall or the library—a fact to which the Colonel's occasional roars bore evidence, whenever something had become displaced from its familiar disorder.

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Now the old gentleman carefully selected a walking stick from the corner, and Sybil exclaimed at sight of the guns.

"Oh, how the boys would love these guns!" she cried.

"Humph!" said the Colonel, passing out of the veranda towards the stables. "Boys! Boys! I've no use for boys! None of 'em any good! None of 'em any good!"

Sybil smiled, remembering his first letter to Dad. "But, Uncle," she said, slyly, "most of us were either boys or girls at one time of our lives—and some of us who were boys seem to have turned out pretty well!"

The old gentleman stood still and looked around at her as if to make sure that he had heard aright. At the sight of her rather mischievous little smile he glared and frowned tremendously. Then he remarked:

"Humph!" and stalked on, while Sybil followed him, smiling.

The stable was a long, low building of gray stone, and a negro voice from within could be heard talking to the horses.

"Come outen dar, Miss Em'ly, you done had yo' dinner! You Selim, you nip my haid an' I'll smack you!"

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"You Japhet!" the Colonel called out, as they stood in the doorway and looked into the fragrant gloom of the interior, "you Japhet, bring out the horses for Missy to see!" Then, to Sybil, "Can't do themselves justice in the stalls!"

And Japhet, whom she found to be the aged coachman who had driven her up from the boat landing, led them forth, one after the other, grinning with delight and pride, answering the Colonel's inquiries after their health with evident satisfaction. At last the old gentleman said:

"Now put a side saddle on Damascus, and saddle Selim for me."

At that the old man stood still and stared at his master as if he felt he could not have heard correctly.

"Suh?" he asked, his mouth wide open.

The Colonel raised his cane. "You heard what I said, you no 'count rascal! You heard what I said," he roared. "Now you jump!"

Japhet jumped, and it seemed scarcely a minute before he returned with a horse that he had not shown before, a horse of glistening black, with only a star of white on his

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forehead. He whinnied when he saw the Colonel, and arched his splendid neck.

"Well, Selim," the old gentleman said, in the gentlest tone Sybil had heard him use, except when he had spoken of the closed door, "come here!"

Old Japhet dropped the bridle, and the beautiful animal went directly to his master. "This, my dear," said the Colonel, "is my old friend Selim. We've been cronies for more years than I like to remember, considering the sum of a horse's life. How many miles have you carried me, Selim? Hey?"

Selim rubbed his soft muzzle against his master's face with low murmurings of joy, and the old gentleman put his hand in a coat pocket. Selim bent his head toward the concealed hand, and his master turned. Selim walked gently around to the other side, and again the Colonel turned. Sybil laughed at the little play of the two old friends.

"Oh, he is perfectly beautiful," she cried. "He is really trying to talk to you! He's a darling! The loveliest horse I've ever, ever seen!"

"And what do you think of that one?"

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the Colonel asked, nodding over his shoulder towards the doorway from which Japhet was leading another.

It is almost impossible to describe the color of a red Arabian. Damascus had a blaze of white down his face, and a gleam of white upon his chest; except for that, his coat was of an almost iridescent red, or sorrel, gleaming to pale gold where his muscles played in the brightest light, deepening to bronze in the shadows, as full of color as the unopened buds of the oaks, as glossy as a woman's hair. His neck was very deep, and his head unusually small; his dainty ears cupped toward every whisper of sound, and he walked so lightly that the gravel scarcely moved as he trod. He reminded Sybil of one of those wonderful chargers pictured in old paintings, held by pages in satin or velvet, or ridden by some long-haired cavalier.

"Oh!" she cried. "He looks as if he might have marched at the head of a crusade!"

"Doubtless some of his grandfathers did," the Colonel replied. "He is Selim's noblest son. Bring him up closer, Japhet."

But old Japhet held back, and Damascus

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twisted and curveting against his hold on the bridle.

"Bring him here!" the Colonel repeated, his voice beginning to roar.

"Dis ain't no horse for a lady, Cunnel, 'deed he ain't, suh!" old Japhet protested. "Damascus, he ain't nuvver been rid, 'cep-tin' by my boy, Torm. He ain't no lady's horse!"

Sybil's heart began to beat faster. She remembered her boast of the earlier morning with a pang; she remembered the Colonel's saying she had given him a dare. To be sure, she had ridden the doctor's old Betty many a time; but for years Betty had been kept in the stable and back yard because she was too old to do any work. The contrast between Betty and Damascus was absolutely ludicrous; but Sybil, when she beheld a side-saddle on the Arabian, was far from seeing anything amusing in the situation.

"You bring that horse to me!" the Colonel thundered at old Japhet. "Bring him up to this fence!"

He turned to Sybil. "Have you ever ridden?" he asked. She saw the twinkle in his eyes, and tried to appear unconscious of it.

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"Oh, yes," she said, as calmly as she could, while remembering that old Betty had not for many years gone faster than a possible five miles an hour.

"May I have the pleasure of riding with you this morning?" asked the Colonel with a bow. "Damascus is quite at your service, you see."

Sybil saw. Damascus was at that moment doing his utmost to imitate a statue on a pedestal, standing upon his back feet and waving his dainty front ones in the air. Japhet was being pulled almost off the ground in a futile attempt at anchoring the horse by hanging on to the bridle.

"Dis ain't no horse for a lady!" Japhet was still protesting. "Somebody gwine git killed ef dey rides dis horse!"

Sybil's heart thumped away, but she hoped that her expression did not betray her. She glanced down at her skirt; it was a pleated serge, rather old-fashioned now; and, of course, she did not possess a riding habit. The Colonel was broadly smiling, with a teasing twinkle in his eyes; and when she saw that, Sybil looked at him squarely.

"I shall be delighted to go with you, Uncle,



"Oh, I should love to ride him!"

THE FIRST MORNING

if you think you will not be ashamed of me without a riding habit."

It was her turn to smile. The Colonel's expression had instantly changed, the twinkle dying out of his eyes, and a look of great seriousness taking its place. Evidently the chit of a girl was not going to take his dare, either.

"Well—er—perhaps, for the first time we had better try Marguerite or Miss Emily instead of Damascus," he said.

"Yas, suh! Yas, suh!" Japhet agreed. "Marguerite's as gentle as a little lamb. I'll jest tote out a saddle and put it on Marguerite."

But Sybil had moved toward the beautiful, prancing Damascus, holding out her hand and talking to him. At first he jerked away from her, but curiosity at last became too strong for him, and he thrust his lovely head towards the outstretched hand, allowing it finally to touch his nose, then to caress his forehead, his ears, and to pass down the gleaming arch of his neck. At last he stepped closer to her, and began to investigate her cheek and the curve of her neck with his soft mouth. She took his bridle from Japhet's

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unwilling hand, secretly trembling as she did so, and stood, talking to Damascus while he responded in his horse's way.

The Colonel watched the little scene almost breathlessly.

"Oh, I should love to ride him! He's a perfect gentleman!" Sybil said over her shoulder.

"Well, I'll be blessed!" the Colonel exclaimed. "That's more than he will let me do. I believe the rascal's fallen in love with you!"

"Of course he has!" she laughed, her cheek against the white blaze on his face. "He thinks he has to reciprocate a lady's feeling, like any other very perfect, gentle knight! Don't you, Damascus?" And Damascus whinnied his reply.

"It mought be Miss Sybilla!" Japhet said, under his breath. Sybil thought she must be dreaming when she heard the words, and the tone, almost of awe, in which they were spoken.

The Colonel had suddenly grown pale. "Here, take Selim," he said to the old negro, passing him the bridle. "We will not ride to-day."

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Then, with scarcely a look at Sybil, and with bent head and dragging step, he went back to the house, leaving his guest to follow or not, as she wished.

VII

THE COLONEL WRITES A NOTE

IN spite of a recurring feeling of homesickness, Sybil's days at Montebello seemed to fly away. It was such a new experience to be free from studies, free from household tasks, at liberty to browse through the Colonel's library, to walk, or sew, or try the old music primly arranged in the black lacquered cabinet with gold and mother-of-pearl figures, that stood beside the square piano in the front drawing-room. Sometimes she would persuade Miss Sophia to sing some of the old ballads that she loved, and that sounded so amusingly quaint to Sybil. Miss Sophia's favorites were the very sentimental ones, and the little lady's voice would tremble and her cheeks flush over their words; and it was plainly to be seen that their old-fashioned, florid sentiments still held a thrill for Miss Sophia!

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"Joys that we've tasted may sometimes return,
But the torch when once wasted, ah! how can
it burn?"

and

"Many the changes since last we met,
Blushes have brightened and tears have been
wept!"

These still had power to move the little
lady! And there was another, even more
beloved:

"The years . . . creep slowly by, Lorena,
The sn-o-o-w . . . is on the grass again!"

with its refrain:

"The sun can never dip so low-ow-ow
Adown affection's clou-ou-oudless sky!"

Sybil never tired of hearing Miss Sophia quaver forth these ditties, especially when she accompanied them with tales of the old gay days before-the-war, when youths with guitars and flutes sat on the piazza steps on summer evenings, singing the old songs, in the moonlight, to girls in ruffled muslins and

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blue ribbons and wreaths on their curling hair, while the fragrance of jasmine and tuberose was all about them, and the little owls called mournfully from the grove back of the house, or perhaps a whippoorwill from the wheat fields. . . .

Indeed, something of the romance of those antebellum days still lingered about Montebello, making its half-sad, half-sweet appeal to Sybil; insensibly the place grew dear to her, insensibly she began to feel as if she must always have belonged there.

It was evident from the beginning of her visit that she was destined to be a prime favorite with the Colonel. The old gentleman wanted her with him every hour of the day, from the time of their morning rides together to their nightly talks before the fire, or, as the evenings grew warmer, on the south veranda. Sybil's tales of the twins, and even of the boys, seemed endlessly to amuse him; but she herself amused him most of all when she talked to him as if he were one of the children, to be ordered about and managed and looked after, coaxed and petted and scolded. In fact, Sybil had been at Montebello scarcely a month before she was man-

THE COLONEL WRITES A NOTE

aging everyone there, as she had managed the family at home!

But it agreed with them! Miss Sophia seemed to grow younger every day, and Sybil was extremely popular with the servants. For one thing, as Aunt Sair' Ann, the cook, said to her husband, Shem, when he had been telling her how devoted to the young girl the old gentleman was becoming:

"Missy cert'n'y is makin' Ol' Marster stand aroun'; an' it's my opinion, Shem, dat a certain amount o' bossin' is de best kind o' spring medicine for de men folks!"

"Ain't only de Cunnel," said Shem, with a reminiscent grin. "Missy come out 'n de po'ch whiles I was sweepin' of it yestiddy mornin', and she say, 'Shem,' she say, 'don't you forget to sweep under de mat!' Land! I mos' jump outen my skin, Sair' Ann! It shore did sound jes' like Ol' Miss herself a talkin'. Dat's jest de way *she* used to do, come out to de door an' say, 'Shem, don't forget to sweep under de mat!' Dat's what ol' Miss used to say, come day go day, year in, year out!"

Sair' Ann shook her turbaned head. "I'se a believer, I is, an' I knows right well folks

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don't come back in dis world, leastways in de flesh. But you listen to what I'm tellin' you! Ef I didn't jest know dat, Shem, I sure would say 'twas Ol' Miss herself a talkin' when Missy talks!"

Shem set his broom in the corner, perilously near his wife's hot stove, and put his mouth to her ear.

"Sair' Ann," he whispered, "who you reckon Ol' Marse done took Missy for, de night she come, an' he looked so scared-like? Huh?"

But Aunt Sair' Ann had gray hairs of experience under her turban, and she was not going to be led into dangerous speculation by any husband of hers. "You go 'long to yo' work, you Shem, an' stop a tryin' to probe into de mysttreeous! You leave dat to de white folks! I got my biscuit to beat for breakfast!"

One day Miss Sophia, who had been complaining of a headache, and was lying on the sofa in Sybil's room, watching the young girl's busy fingers making a small repair on one of her dresses, said:

"I am *so* glad to see the way your dresses are made, my dear. Do you know, I never

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quite believed that ladies *were* wearing the sort of things I have occasionally seen pictures of!"

She laughed, and Sybil found something exceedingly touching and pathetic in that little laugh.

"I was sure they just *couldn't* wear them, my dear, because there didn't seem to be any way to get into them!"

Then, seeing Sybil's look of astonishment, she added: "When there were buttons at all, they just seemed to be dotted on where they could not be needed!"

"But they fasten under a pleat or something, with hooks and eyes!" cried Sybil.

"Yes, I know that now," Miss Sophia confided, "because I—I hope you won't mind, my dear—I *peeped* at some of the beautiful things hanging up in your closet!"

Sybil, remembering the scant simplicity of her wardrobe, was too touched to reply; and Miss Sophia added, wistfully, "Oh, my dear, that little muslin with the lilac sprigs is so *exquisite!*"

Sybil remembered the dress; it was a "handdown" from Mother-dear's wealthy school-friend who often sent boxes of things

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to the doctor's house to be made over for Mother-dear and the girls. Everyone in the family, even unobservant Dick, had laughed at Sybil the one time she had dared to appear in the lavender lawn, and called her "Grandma"; and when she put it into Sybil's trunk, Mother-dear had said, laughing:

"It's a perfectly ridiculous dress for you to wear, darling, at your age; but we don't know what facilities for laundry you may find, and it may be useful."

And this was the "sprigged muslin" Miss Sophia so greatly admired! A sudden inspiration came to Sybil.

"Cousin Sophia," she said, "I wonder how you'd look in that dress! Let's try it on you!"

Miss Sophia's cheeks flushed. "Oh, I'm afraid I'd look too—too—"

But Sybil had disappeared into the depths of the closet, in a moment to emerge; and in just another moment she was helping the little lady out of the white "josie" that Miss Sophia had been taught to consider the proper garment for a lady who was not feeling well, and into the lavender dress.

The shoulders drooped on Miss Sophia's

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tiny frame, and the skirt was what Sybil called "miles" too long; but the sleeves, that were meant to be half length on Sybil, came modestly down to Miss Sophia's hands; and certainly the color was becoming to the dear little soul's soft gray curls and flushed cheeks.

"You are just too sweet for anything," Sybil cried. "I'm going to alter it a little, and then you must wear it down to dinner."

"Oh, I fear I couldn't!" Miss Sophia weakly protested, all the while threading a needle and beginning to rip out the other sleeve. "I am afraid dear Brother will think I am trying to appear youthful! I shouldn't like to seem ungenteel!"

"I'm sure there's nothing ungenteel about a dress I have worn myself, Cousin Sophia!" Sybil teased; but Miss Sophia could never understand joking.

"Oh, no; Oh, no; I didn't mean to imply that, my dear! And—Oh! I *should* like to wear a dress that didn't show its fastening!"

It ended in Sybil's making over several of Miss Sophia's dresses, to her intense joy; and no little girl in her Easter hat was ever more delighted than she, when the Colonel actually

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complimented her upon her appearance in the "sprigged muslin."

"Well, Sophia," he remarked, when she wavered into the dining-room, a very smiling Sybil looking over her shoulder, "you don't look ill! I hope you're not developing whimsies!"

Miss Sophia was passing around the table to her own place, and Sybil gave the Colonel a surreptitious but unmistakable pinch on the arm, and vigorously shook her head at him.

"Hey?" he said, looking up at her; but Miss Sophia thought the exclamation meant for herself.

"I feel ve-ry well now, Brother, thank you!" she said, hurriedly, her eyes downcast in such a flutter of self-consciousness as she had not felt since her last ball in '61.

Sybil was now making wonderful faces at the old gentleman, who in return was staring at her in amazement. "Doesn't Cousin Sophia look sweet?" she asked, and immediately shook her head up and down very vigorously.

Shem precipitately disappeared into the pantry, and the Colonel again asked:

"Hey?" He looked from Sybil to his sister, and then something seemed to pierce his

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bewilderment. "Oh!" he said. "Oh! Why, yes, Sophia, you *are* looking very well indeed!"

Then he looked at Sybil for approval, and when she beamed upon him he began to rub his arm where she had pinched it, and then shook his fist at her. Sybil laughed silently, and silently clapped her hands. Evidently the Colonel enjoyed her approval, for he continued:

"You look very well *indeed*, Sophia!"

"Isn't her new gown becoming?" Sybil asked.

"Hey?" said the Colonel, as if wondering where the new gown might be. "Oh! Oh, yes, Sophia, your new gown becomes you very well, very well indeed. Never saw you looking better!"

Miss Sophia looked up for an instant with rosy cheeks, and eyes misty with joy at his praise. "Do—do you think it—is genteel, Brother?" she asked; and again Sybil shook her head up and down until her curls bobbed.

"Most genteel, Sophia," the old gentleman assured her, returning Sybil's smile of contentment.

Indeed, everyone was in a very good humor,

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and it promised to be an exceptionally pleasant meal, for not yet had Sybil succeeded in persuading the Colonel entirely to control his temper, which was most apt to explode at the table.

But alas for good beginnings! That dinner was destined to be remembered not alone for Miss Sophia's new gown. They had not reached dessert when Sybil, who faced the window, exclaimed:

"There's someone on horseback coming up the drive!" It was the first time she had seen a stranger enter the gate of Montebello.

"Oh, I do hope it is Molly!"

The Colonel's brows drew forbiddingly together, but Sybil pretended not to notice that, any more than Miss Sophia's excitement.

"No—it's a man—a servant, I think!"

"Keep your seat, Miss!" the Colonel thundered, as she was rising a little, the better to see out of the window. Sybil raised her eyebrows at him, as she sat down, and the Colonel looked rather ashamed.

He was really becoming afraid of Sybil's eyebrows! If they were drawn upwards, it meant that she was surprised at his display of temper; if they were lowered a little, it

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meant that she was hurt; and above all things the Colonel was beginning to want to please her. No doting grandfather could have been more her willing slave; and perhaps he rejoiced in his pleasant bondage all the more because it was so novel. More than once he had been on the point of roaring, had caught a glimpse of those raised eyebrows of surprise or disdain, and had almost swallowed the roar, to the amazement of Miss Sophia and the intense delight of the servants, who had quite fallen into the habit of having to hasten from the room, or smile "befo' de quality!"

Now, while the Colonel was fidgetting, secretly ashamed of his display of temper, and a good deal in fear of what Sybil might think or say, Shem came into the room bearing a letter on a tray. His eyes were popping, the whites showing like half moons; his bearing was a ludicrous mixture of dignity laboring under excitement, of fear and delight.

He held the tray at arm's length toward the Colonel, who glared down at the letter upon it.

"Take that away!" he thundered, when he had seen the handwriting.

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Shem looked at Sybil—an evidence of the place in the household that the servants, as well as the Colonel, were beginning to give her.

"Do you hear me? Take that away!" the Colonel repeated, while Miss Sophia was wringing her hands and trembling, murmuring, "Oh, Brother! Oh, Brother! O dear! O dear!"

Only Sybil remained calm; it was the very fact that she always did remain calm which gave her the mastery of every situation with the irascible old gentleman.

"Now, Uncle," she said quietly, "if you don't read that letter you'll die of curiosity!" Then she added, with a smile, "And so will I!"

"It's no affair of yours, Miss!" the Colonel thundered valiantly, in a last effort to carry his own way. "I say take that thing away!" he roared at Shem.

Sybil calmly reached across, took the note from the tray, opened the envelope, and laid the letter in front of the Colonel. "Now you know, Uncle dear, excitement's very bad for you! And you'll make yourself hoarse,

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if you go on like that! Come, now, read your letter, like a good little boy!"

The Colonel gasped. "What's that, what's that? Do you dare to call me a child, Miss?"

Sybil smiled at him serenely. "Only sometimes, Uncle dear!"

The old gentleman glared at her; then the corners of his mouth began to twitch. "Here! Read it yourself, you saucy piece!" he grumbled, and tossed the letter to her.

Dimpling, she read it aloud.

"Mr. Rutherford presents his compliments to Colonel Crockett, and hopes it may be convenient for Miss Crockett, Miss Crawford and Colonel Crockett to receive Miss Molly Rutherford and himself this afternoon."

"Oh, how lovely!" she cried, waving the note. "Now we shall see Molly, at last! Oh-eeeeee!"

The Colonel's lips were pressed together in a straight line, and Miss Sophia, either from wonder or fright, was motionless, her little hands in her lap, her eyes fixed on her brother.

"They shall not enter my gates!" said the

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Colonel; and the calm decisiveness in his voice was far more impressive than his roars.

Sybil gasped. "What on earth do you mean?" she cried.

"They shall not enter my gates," the Colonel repeated. "I mean precisely what I say." Then, to Shem, "There is no answer to that letter. Send the man home."

For a moment Sybil stared at him, wide-eyed, too surprised to speak. Then a wave of color flooded her face, and she arose.

"I must ask to be excused for a moment," she said formally, to Miss Sophia, who was now trembling and wringing her hands again. Then she walked out of the room with her head held very high.

In a few moments, however, she was back, bringing the Colonel's own inkstand, his pen, and a sheet of note paper. She put them on the table in front of him.

"Now what do you mean by that, Miss?" demanded the Colonel, looking up at her with a tremendous frown.

Sybil was inwardly quaking, but she spoke precisely as she would have spoken to Hallam or Bobs or Bunny.

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"There are your writing things, Uncle dear," she said.

Miss Sophia began to weep, and the Colonel was speechless. Sybil slid into her place at the table, and in a moment looked up, with as good an imitation of surprise as she knew how to assume.

"Didn't I bring everything?" she asked.

Then the Colonel waved his hand vigorously toward the writing things. "What did you bring those things in here for?" he demanded, roaring his loudest. Sybil nerved herself to reply calmly.

"Why, so that you could answer Mr. Rutherford, of course," she said. Then she put her head on one side and smiled at the Colonel. "Oh, I've been in Maryland long enough to know *something* of Southern politeness, Uncle dear! I knew you were only making believe when you said the note did not need an answer!"

"What?" exclaimed the Colonel, sinking back in his chair.

"Oh, yes! I see through you, you know! You couldn't let a lady think you didn't want to see her—now could you? That would scarcely be Southern hospitality, would it?"

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And she's my friend, too, you know! I knew you just didn't want to leave Aunt Sair' Ann's fried chicken to go to the library! So I brought the library to you—all that you'll need of it for writing one short note!"

Shem had been standing behind his master's chair, still holding the tray, a picture of distress; now he hastily left the room, his hand over his mouth.

But the Colonel was not to be managed so easily. He glared at Sybil, who was trying to appear unaware of it. He pounded his fist upon the table.

"Young lady," he said, sternly, "you go too far. I will not be treated like a child, d'ye hear? I—say—those—people—shall not enter my gates, and they *shall* not, d'ye hear? I say, d'ye hear?"

Something seemed to rise in Sybil's throat, and a wave of loneliness and homesickness swept over her. She flushed deeply, and faced him.

"Oh, very well, Uncle; I hear you very well, but I have something to say, too! I have been your guest for five weeks, and I am deeply grateful for my delightful visit; but I am going home to-morrow!"

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"What?" exclaimed the Colonel, while Miss Sophia reached across the table toward Sybil, as if to lay a detaining hand upon her.

"Certainly," said Sybil, "I am not going to remain where my friends are not welcome! Mr. Rutherford and Molly are my friends, I am sure; they told me that I might call upon them for anything, if I needed them. I *shall* call upon them, for—for shelter"—she had grown very dramatic—"until I can telegraph for Dad to come and take me home! I am not going to remain where I am roared at, and pounded at, and never spoken to by my own name! I am not going to stay in your old house, with everything in it old and everybody in it old, and where I feel like a bird in a cage or some poor thing in jail! I am not going to stay here another day! You are a cross, dictatorial, disagreeable old man! And when I've been just longing to see Molly ever since I came, and now she wants to come, you say she shall not enter your gates! Very well, very well! And *I* say *I* will not remain inside of them! I—I thought I was beginning to l-love you, and I thought—you—liked me—a little bit, too! I meant to do you some good by coming down to visit you, and——"

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She suddenly burst into tears, and fled from the room.

"God bless my soul!" said the Colonel, as he sank back in his chair, as if too weak to do anything else, staring into space in the direction from which Sybil had faced him with her unforeseen display of anger. Miss Sophia was crying, in the utmost distress.

"Oh, Brother, what *have* you done? Oh, *Brother*, what *have* you done?"

At last the Colonel roused himself, and thundered back at her. "Sophia, will you behave like a sensible woman? Stop that noise, stop it, I say! Bless my soul and body! With these women in the house, a man can't call his soul his own!"

Then, with an accompaniment of growls, the old gentleman drew toward him the sheet of paper Sybil had brought, wrote a few lines upon it, put it into an envelope which he addressed, and called out:

"Shem! You Shem! Take this out to Mr. Rutherford's boy, and go tell Miss—Miss Sybil to come down to her dinner."

"Yes, sir," said Shem, rolling his eyes and looking as if the heavens were about to fall.

The Colonel and Miss Sophia made a weak

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attempt at eating, until the old negro sidled back into the room.

"Well?" asked the Colonel.

"Please, sir, Cunnel, Missy she say, she—she say—she say she don' want no mo' dinner! She say, she say"—Shem looked as if he were ready to run or dodge—"she say she too busy packin' up her things to come down!"

Miss Sophia put her hands over her face, and the old gentleman violently pushed back his chair, stalked out of the dining-room to his library, and slammed the door behind him.

VIII

THE COLONEL SURRENDERS

ONCE in her own room, with the door shut and locked, Sybil threw herself on the bed in a torrent of tears. The struggle with the fiery old gentleman had cost her much in strength and courage. It had been a battle to the death, and she had lost; she was obliged to admit that much, although she had tried to cover her retreat with a great show of independence; and Sybil hated to be beaten in any game. Then, too, there was the homesickness and loneliness of the weeks she had spent quite alone with these old people. She was glad that she had been able to conceal it from the Colonel, and especially from Cousin Sophia; but the fact remained, and was none the less real, that she had been terribly, miserably homesick. Every sign of affection from Miss Sophia, every little attention from the Colonel, had made her ashamed of want-

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ing so much to leave them, yet, at the same time, only served to remind her all the more of home, since she was forever wishing for one of the boys or the twins to share each new pleasure with her. She had longed for someone of her own age, and until to-day had longed in vain; and now, when it seemed that Molly would at last come to see her, the Colonel had been horrid and disagreeable and unreasonable. . . .

Her stock of adjectives was inadequate to the state of her feelings! The Colonel was everything disagreeable that she could think of—and then, with the generous little laugh that had made the young Crawfords love her, poor Sybil had to admit, ruefully, that she had been just as horrid as the Colonel himself! Her lips trembled anew at the memory of it, and her face flushed. Such a display of temper! Never in her life had she behaved so badly! How should she ever dare to confess to Mother-dear and Dad? She knew just what they would do when she told them. Dad's eyes would look sad and tired, the way they always did when he was worried over a very ill patient or one of the boys had to be "talked to"; and Mother-dear would put

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her beloved arms about Sybil's shoulders, and press her cheek to Sybil's, and say, in a tone that would go to anybody's heart, "Why, my little daughter!"

So it was a very disconsolate young woman who sat on the side of the big four-poster, with a wet ball of a handkerchief squeezed up in one hand.

"I don't know what on earth possessed me," she said to herself. "I must have caught it from the Colonel!"

She got up and crossed the room to put some cold water on her burning cheeks; and it was just at that moment that Shem knocked timidly at her door.

"Please, Missy, please, lil Missy, Marster say yo' dinner sholy will be col' ef you-all don' come down rale quick!"

"I don't want any dinner!" Sybil said, choking, yet loud enough for the words to reach old Shem. And to herself she added, "The idea! He thinks I will allow this just to blow over, does he? Well, I'll show him! I'll stand by what I said! I will not stay here! I will not, I will not!"

"Please, lil Missy, de Cunnel he say he persents his compliments, an' won't you

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please, Miss, come down an' finish yo' dinner befo' it'gits cold?"

"Tell the Colonel I am too busy packing up to go home!" Sybil said, and listened to old Shem's horrified exclamation and his shuffling footsteps as he went away with this dreadful message.

Then she began to move about the room, making a half-hearted effort at collecting her belongings. It was altogether inconsistent, but she could not help wondering what the Colonel would say and do when Shem repeated her message. She expected to hear a roar; but none came. Somehow she was beginning to feel very uncomfortable in the region near her heart.

"Well, I don't care!" she said to herself. "He had no right to be so unreasonable!" Then she took some dresses out of her closet, and laid them on her bed.

"I suppose the poor cross old dear really didn't mean a word of it, in his heart," she said, standing in the middle of the room, quite unconscious of the fact that her best white muslin was dragging on the floor. "He does behave just like a spoiled baby!" she said,

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half laughing. "Well, he has got to be disciplined, that's all!"

She laid the dress on a chair, and crossing the room, pulled out her top bureau drawer and dumped its contents upon the bed—a medley of ribbons and letters and handkerchiefs, shoe-laces, hair-pins, spools, faded flowers, and half a hundred more of those articles that, entirely of their own accord and, of course, entirely unassisted, somehow or other *will* get into a girl's top drawer.

Sybil looked at the mass with dismay. "Mercy me!" she exclaimed. "I ought to be ashamed of myself! This is as mussy as Uncle's library table, or his corner of rubbish in the hall! It little becomes you, Sybil Crawford, to scold and fly out at that poor old man, when you're just as untidy and just as cross and disagreeable as he is!"

Her anger had disappeared, and she sat down in a rocking-chair to make some sort of order out of the chaos on the bed. While she assorted things into little piles she went on talking to herself, in the way she had adopted since there had been no twins or Mother-dear passing in and out of her room to talk to.

THE COLONEL SURRENDERS

"Well," she said, "I'm not going to stay here, anyway, if that's the way he is going to do! Not let Molly come to see me! I never heard of such a thing! And not even to answer the note! It's outrageous! And there's something queer about this place anyway. Here I've been over a month, and I haven't seen a soul outside of the family. When I asked Cousin Sophia if people around here didn't call, she just trotted off looking as frightened as if I were a bomb! And when I tried to get some information from the servants, Jinny rolled her eyes and giggled, and Aunt Sair' Ann said she hadn't any time to waste on 'specurations'! And now when somebody *wants* to come, Uncle won't let them!"

Her courage grew with the repeating of her wrongs. "He just wants to keep me shut up here for the rest of my life, I suppose, the way he has kept poor little darling Cousin Sophia! I suppose he'd like me to tremble and cry, too, as she does! Well, I'll show him!"

Her eyes filled with tears. "And I want to see my own darling Dad, anyway! I don't want to stay in this old——"

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A faint knock sounded upon her door; yet she knew it was not timid enough to be Miss Sophia's. She listened for an instant, without moving; the knock was repeated, but now sharply, insistently. Still she did not speak, but looked over her shoulder toward the door; and a third time the knock came, at last accompanied by the words:

"Er—it's half past two!"

Slowly a smile spread over Sybil's face, and she whispered to herself, "Oh, the poor old dear! He's come to make up!" Aloud she only said, coolly:

"Thank you very much!"

"Er—you'll be dressed by four o'clock, won't you?" She wondered what that indicated, but the voice went on. "Because Miss Rutherford and her grandfather will probably be here by that time!"

"Am I to meet them outside the gate?" Sybil asked, trying to make her voice sound very stern.

For a moment there was no reply; then the old gentleman said, tremblingly, pleadingly, "Sybilla!"

It was only the second time he had called her by her name, and Sybil's expression of

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mischief softened; she went to the door and opened it.

"Uncle!" she said, and held out her hand.

But the Colonel came into her room, and stood before her. "Sybilla," he said, "don't go away!"

"Uncle! I——" She was so touched that she did not quite dare to trust herself to speak; and evidently the Colonel misunderstood her reticence.

"Don't go away, Sybilla! We have grown to love you very dearly; and we need you here, Sybilla! Don't go away!"

"Uncle!"

"I—I'm not what I ought to be. I *am* a cross and disagreeable old man, as you said; but won't you forgive me, Sybilla? I will do anything you say, if you will stay here. I—it would be very hard to do without you now, my child!"

She put her hand on his arm and tried to speak, but he was so intent on his pleading that he would not wait to hear.

"I never had a little girl, but I had a boy; and I lost my boy through anger, through my own anger. He went away. And now—you

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say—you are going away—too! Don't leave us two old people here alone again, Sybilla!"

His voice trembled pitifully, and the proud old figure looked bent and old and feeble. There were tears in Sybil's eyes when, at last, he looked up for her answer.

"Why, Uncle dear! Uncle! I didn't really mean it, and I was cross and disagreeable, too, and you are a dear old darling Uncle, and so is Cousin Sophia—I mean—she's dear and darling, too, and there isn't anything to forgive, except that you must forgive me!"

The old gentleman put his hand on her head, and bent it back until her face was upturned to his. "Don't go away, Sybilla!" he repeated. The fear of her leaving him seemed to crowd everything else from his thoughts. "I've lost so much, little girl! I couldn't bear to lose you, too!"

Impulsively she threw her arms around his neck, although she had to reach up rather far to do so, and burst into tears; and not until he had to comfort her, did the old gentleman seem to be reassured.

"There, there!" he said, at last, when he had almost patted her hair down. "There, there! That will do, that will do!" He was

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rapidly becoming himself again, as the return of his crustiness bore witness. "Don't be womanish, Miss! This is all Sophia's fault! She's forever driveling, and now you've caught it!"

Sybil drew off, laughing through her tears, "Oh! Aren't you ashamed of yourself to talk like that! And so soon after we've made up!" she cried.

The Colonel tried to glare and look ferocious, his eyebrows working at a great rate. "Hey? What's that? What d'ye mean, Miss?"

And when Sybil, still laughing, shook her head at him, and he found that he could no longer keep up the pretence of anger, and the corners of his mouth were beginning to twitch, he turned and stalked out of the room, and Sybil heard him stamping down the stairs and roaring:

"Shem! You Shem! So—phi—a! Jinny! Shem! Here! What's the matter with everybody in this house to-day! Wind's from the east, got into everybody, can't find a soul to do what——" until his voice disappeared by way of the front door.

Then she sat down on the bed, among the

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medley from her top drawer, and laughed. "Oh, the great, big, dear, cross, kind, disagreeable spoiled old darling *thing!*" she said, and wiped away her tears.

IX

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WHEN Sybil came down to the hall at a quarter to four, dressed in a fresh pink lawn that Mother-dear had just sent her, she found Miss Sophia awaiting her at the foot of the stairs.

The little lady fluttered toward her. "Oh, my dear, I am so excited!" she cried. "It has been so long since I've received visitors, I'm afraid I've forgotten my manners! And Sair' Ann wants to know which to send up, the fruit cake or some of Miss-Sally-Witherspoon's-pound-with-raisins, and Jinny has a fit of the giggles, and has torn her best apron right down the front breadth, and I'm sure I don't know whether to wear my hair brooch with pearls, or the cameo. Oh, my dear! Do tell me which looks best with these lavender sprigs!"

Miss Sophia was breathless at last, and

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Sybil's eyes were dancing with suppressed merriment. "You darling!" she cried, kissing the flushed, delicate old cheek. "The hair brooch, of course, and Miss Sally's raisin cake, by all means; and I'll go see what I can do to Jinny to calm her nerves!"

Miss Sophia trotted across the hall to the big, gold-framed mirror that hung near the front door, to pin the hair brooch in the lace at her throat; but Sybil was not destined to calm Jinny's nerves that day. As she turned toward the back of the house the Colonel appeared in the library door.

"Oh!" cried Sybil, holding up her hands in admiration. "Oh! You magnificent person! Oh, Uncle, turn around and let me look at you!"

"Tut, tut, tut!" the Colonel protested; but there was a ring of pleasure in his tone that could not be suppressed. "I've no patience with your prinkings! Sophia, will you behave like a sensible woman!"

For at Sybil's exclamation, Miss Sophia had trotted back and was holding up her hands, just as Sybil was, in admiration. The Colonel had discarded his usual baggy gray suit, with its dragging pockets and trousers that were

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creased everywhere save down the front; he was arrayed in black coat and striped trousers of modern cut, that seemed just from the tailor's hands, and the narrow black string tie which he had invariably worn was replaced by a broad four-in-hand of black brocade. He stood in the door nervously winding his watch, from which hung a bunch of seals instead of the usual chain of faded, woven hair.

"Uncle!" Sybil rushed up to him, and taking his arm whirled him around. "Cousin Sophia! Look! Look at him! Isn't he the most bee-autiful creature you ever saw!"

The Colonel was still growling a little shamefacedly, but Miss Sophia and Sybil were long past noticing that.

"Brother! Oh, Brother! Where *did* you get those clothes? Why, I've never seen them before, and I've *never* seen you look so handsome!"

"He's the handsomest thing in the world!" cried Sybil, still dancing about him.

The old gentleman had recovered from his first bashfulness. "Mind your own business, Sophia!" he said; but he was smiling. "Sent to Balt'mer for 'em. You with your lilac

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fripperies, and Missy here with folderols and fiddle-de-dees—reckon I can have new clothes, too!"

Sybil laughed out, merrily; the idea of the Colonel's childlike jealousy of Miss Sophia's lavender-sprigged muslin was too utterly ludicrous! What she might have said, however, remained unuttered. In their excitement, they had not heard the approaching wheels, but now, at the sound of steps on the veranda, they all turned, jumping as if they were children caught at some naughtiness.

Sybil and Molly flew toward each other, and Mr. Rutherford went up to the little lady of the house.

"Sophia," he said, bending over her trembling hand, "it is many years since we met! I hope I find you as well as you are charming!"

Then he took the Colonel's outstretched hand, and the two old men stood so for a long moment, hands clasped, looking into each other's eyes, while Molly pressed Sybil's arm, as if to call her attention to them.

"William," said Mr. Rutherford at last, "the years do a great deal to make us forget!"

The Colonel shook his hand. "I don't for-

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get, Tom," he said, sadly. "But I reckon we may as well agree that we've both been in the right, and begin over again!"

The humorous twist of his lips interpreted the true meaning of his little speech; evidently Mr. Rutherford understood, for he said:

"Yes, I reckon that's the best way, William! And we'll blame these young ladies for whatever comes of it!"

Sybil introduced her friend, and when the Colonel and Mr. Rutherford were deep in conversation, and Miss Sophia had tiptoed out to the pantry to oversee the serving of Miss Sally Witherspoon's raisin-cake and the strawberry sherbet, Molly and Sybil, on the big sofa in the drawing-room, were doing their best to make up for lost time.

"I've coaxed and bullied and teased Grandfather every day, honey, to bring me over here; but there's something between those two old darlings," said Molly, "and they have not spoken for years. And they are brothers-in-law, too, you know!"

"No, I didn't know it! I don't know a thing!" Sybil said, pouting a little.

"Well, I'll tell you all I know, though it

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isn't much," said Molly. "The Colonel's wife was my great-aunt Sybilla; it's a horrid thing to say, but I—I think our family didn't like her marrying your uncle, for some reason or other!"

Sybil laughed. "Dreadful of them!" she said. "But since they are two generations back of us, I don't think we need harbor it up against each other, Molly dear! So Uncle's wife was named Sybilla!"

Molly nodded. "I suppose your father named you after her," she said. "You see, she was his aunt or cousin or something! And I suppose that's why Grandfather seemed startled when I told him your name, that day on the landing."

But Sybil knew more of herself, and her actual relationship to the Crawford family, than Molly did. Why, indeed, she wondered, had she been named Sybilla? *Was* it merely a coincidence? Yet the name was certainly not a common one!

"Well, I shouldn't worry about it, anyway, if I were you!" said Molly, noticing her moment of abstraction. "How do you like Montebello?"

"I love it," Sybil replied. "But—Molly,

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please answer this—why, *why* do these old people live so cut off from the rest of the neighborhood? I've been here over a month, and you are the first souls I have seen from outside Montebello. And when I even mention that to Cousin Sophia, she runs away like the White Rabbit!"

Molly's face had grown thoughtful and a little reserved. "I really don't know anything about it, dear," she said. "Of course I have wondered, too; I even asked Mamma, and she replied that it rested entirely with the Colonel, that he had closed his gates and his house to everybody, years and years ago. But she wouldn't tell me anything more." After a pause she added, "Have you seen the Hermit?"

"Hermit? The man who lives in that house we saw from the boat? Why, no!"

"I just wondered," said Molly, feebly.

"But—but you wouldn't have asked that, if it hadn't some connection with—with *us*!" Sybil suddenly found herself arrayed with all her strength of loyalty on the side of the Colonel; she could not have told why, but at the first breath or shadow of criticism her heart was up in arms for him.

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"I really don't know a thing about him," Molly repeated, "but his house, you know, is on land that used to belong to Montebello!"

"But—but I have been all over the place, time and again, with Uncle! I've never seen it!"

Molly gave a little shrug, as if to disclaim any responsibility for whatever might be. "Well, I'm sure I can't make it out! I've tried again and again to find out about him, and so has my brother Jack; but whenever we ask any of the older people who might know something, they immediately look as if we had trodden on their toes, and they were trying not to show how it hurt. Then they tell us—perhaps not in so many words, but just as plainly as if they did—that we are impertinent children and mustn't ask questions beyond our years!"

Sybil laughed merrily. "Oh, how the twins would love this!" she cried.

"You dear!" said Molly. "I just know you've been homesick, all alone here by yourself! But now that Grandfather has forced his way in, we certainly must see a lot of each other."

That day was to hold one more excitement

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for Sybil. The Colonel had helped Molly into the Fordham carriage as if she were a queen, and, with Miss Sophia and Sybil, stood under the white-pillared portico to watch the carriage pass down the drive and out of the gate—his first guests in how many years, Sybil wondered, as she stood a little back of him, in the shadow, to watch the whole of the little scene. When the carriage was quite out of sight, the old gentleman turned toward the stable, and, in his most formidable roar, sent forth the call,

“Japhet! You Ja-a-a-aphet! O-o-oh, Japhet!”

Sybil tucked her hand through the old gentleman’s arm, and looked up into his face, laughing. “What on earth are you roaring at Japhet for, Uncle?” she asked.

“You wait and see, you wait and see!” the Colonel replied. “He’s got something down at the stable that he says belongs to you!”

Her eyes opened wide. “To me? Did I leave anything there? Or has Mother-dear sent still another box?”

The Colonel was beginning to look mightily pleased over something. “Hey? What?

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What?" he asked, as if to gain time; and almost at the moment Japhet came around the drive from the back of the house, leading a splendid horse of brilliant coat and arched neck, bridled, and with a new side-saddle on his back.

"Why, that's Damascus!" Sybil exclaimed. "Why is he saddled now?" Then she thought she guessed the Colonel's meaning, and swinging around in front of him she fairly danced.

"Oh, you darling Uncle! You're going to let me ride Damascus!"

The old gentleman's eyebrows were working at a great rate, and he was doing his futile best to look ferocious.

"Hey? What's that? What's that? I'm going to let you ride Damascus, am I? Hey?"

"You are! You know you are!" Then she laughed, and shook her finger at him. "Oh! You're still trying to make up! As if I hadn't forgotten all about it by this time!"

"Nothing of the kind! I don't know what you mean! And I haven't a word to say about your riding Damascus! He's your own horse!"

For a long moment Sybil looked into his

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face in utter amazement; but as she looked, his expression changed to the most tender one she had ever seen there.

"I'm giving you my best, little girl! I hope he'll carry you well and worthily!" he said, putting his hand on her head.

She drew a deep, quick breath; still she could scarcely understand. But Damascus seemed to know; or, at any rate, he knew that the young lady who daily gave him sugar and carrots and crackers was before him, and he softly whinnied.

Old Japhet grinned. "De new saddle done come jest in time, Cunnel," he said.

Then Sybil seemed to awake; she dragged the Colonel with her out to the driveway, and, laughing and exclaiming all the while, danced around Damascus and Japhet, the beautiful horse curvetting toward her as she moved, evidently thinking this some delightful new game.

"Oh, Uncle! Is he mine? Really and truly mine, my ownest own, to belong to me the way Selim does to you? Oh, do you think he'll ever love me as much? And I may ride him all I want to? And the new side-saddle—is that mine, too? Oh! You're

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such a darling, such a dear, such a perfectly wonderful fairy god-father of an uncle! And to think I was cross and horrid to you, and all the while you were getting this surprise ready for me! Yes, you were, you must have been, because you had ordered the saddle! Oh, I never was so happy in all my life, never, never, *never!*"

She had her arms, by this time, around Damascus's neck, and he was rubbing his velvety nose on her cheek and throat. Old Japhet was grinning with delight. Aunt Sair' Ann had come from her kitchen to see Missy receive her present, and was peeping around the corner of the house, her hands rolled up in her apron. Shem and Jinny were grinning from the hall door, and even Miss Sophia seemed to have forgotten her habitual fear of the unusual, and was smiling at Sybil's delight and the beautiful animal's response. Only the Colonel looked thoughtful, almost sad; and Sybil remembered afterwards that she heard him say to himself:

"Wonderful! Wonderful!"

Shem and Sair' Ann must have heard him say that, too, for they exchanged glances,

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shook their heads, and disappeared, in reality to meet in the kitchen and talk it over.

Suddenly Sybil cried, "Uncle! May I ride him now, just to see how he goes?"

Miss Sophia exclaimed in horror. "In that dress? Oh, my dear!"

"I can change in a minute!" cried Sybil, still looking at the Colonel for permission.

He smiled, and took out his watch. "You have a good hour before supper," he said. "Damascus knows you now, and you ride pretty well."

She was off in a flash, and in an incredibly short time was back again, hatless, but dressed in a shirtwaist and the riding-skirt she and Miss Sophia had made.

The Colonel gallantly helped her to spring to the saddle, and after a first jump of surprise Damascus stood still, looking around with questioning ears at the friend on his back.

"Take it easy at first, and don't go off the place," the Colonel warned her. Then, as if suddenly remembering something, he exclaimed:

"Wait a moment!" and went into the house.

When he returned he was carrying a small

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old-fashioned riding-whip, as dainty as whip could be, of satiny braided leather that had once been white but was now yellowed with age. Its handle was of ivory, carved in the semblance of a tiny elephant.

"You may find this useful," he said, handing the whip to Sybil, "but you will not need it to urge him to speed."

Old Japhet, when he saw the little toy, exclaimed; and bending toward it, as Sybil was inspecting it, he cried:

"Land! Dat's Miss Sybilla's lil switch! Dat was all Missy needed to make her look like the spitten image of——"

But the Colonel, frowning, held up a silencing hand, and Japhet bobbed and retired behind Damascus.

Sybil had read a name that was also her own on the little gold band that ran around the base of the ivory handle. "Oh, Uncle! I—you ought not to give me this!" she cried.

But the Colonel, by way of answer, gave Damascus a smart slap on the shoulder; and with a spring the magnificent animal was off.

Sybil, recalling good old Betty in the back yard at home, and gentle, lady-like Marguerite, felt as if she were riding Pegasus

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himself, flying over the earth, down the drive, around the curve into the narrow road that led to the upper farm, past the big field of young corn, with a fine leap over the shining brooklet that crossed the road at the foot of the hill. She kept her seat well, for the Colonel's daily lessons had taught her how to ride, and he had often declared that she was a born horse-woman. But as she tried once or twice to bring Damascus down to a gentle gait, it gradually dawned upon her that he had taken things into his own control. At any rate, he was entirely beyond hers!

At her first realization that he was running away, her heart gave a great leap, more of excitement than of fear; then, with quick presence of mind, she told herself that there was not much harm in his having his little canter, for there were roads enough crossing and winding through the large estate of Montebello to give him a run that ought to satisfy him. All that was necessary for her, she pluckily assured herself, was to keep him in the road and to look out for overhanging branches. He would tire himself out, eventually, and neither of them would be the worse for the experience.

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But after a while she realized that she was flying along a road that she had not seen before, through woods choked with undergrowth, perhaps outside of the boundary of Montebello, perhaps to open country where she might become lost, perhaps far from anyone of whom she might ask the way back! She had ridden daily for weeks; but, after all, she really knew nothing of this Maryland country.

She talked to Damascus, pleaded with him, but not a twitch of the ears would he vouchsafe in reply. On, on he tore, it seemed to her faster and faster. She had to bend low over her saddle to escape the flying branches, and once or twice they whipped at her face, stinging cruelly. Then she felt her hair tumble down her back.

At last, when her breath was beginning to come in little sobs, Damascus swerved sharply to the right, pounded up a narrow, grass-grown pathway that had once been a road, cleared a barred gate, and came sedately to a walk! He had finished his little run!

X

THE HERMIT

SHAKEN by the great leaps of the horse and his final jump over the gate, her hair tumbling about her, breathless and frightened, Sybil sat limply in the saddle for a moment or two, not caring where he had brought her, satisfied only that his wild ride had come safely to an end at last. Damascus, too, stood as quiet now as any tired old nag, with lowered head and heaving sides. But as her breath came back, and she could raise her head and look about her, Sybil gasped in amazement. There before her, only a few hundred yards away, stretched the waters of the Chesapeake. Even now the *Emma Niles* was puffing past, and sails of fishing-boats gleamed golden in the slanting rays of the descending sun. A line of pine woods, with undergrowth of scrub oak, grew almost to the water's edge; there was only a narrow

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space cleared through them, evidently to give a vista of the Bay. In this pathway the grass grew uncut, and as it drew back from the water the cleared space widened into a door-yard—for it could scarcely be called a garden, so wild and overgrown it was. There was a tangle of old-fashioned roses here, another of blackberry bushes there, a grape-vine over a tumbled-down arbor, a mossgrown spring-house—and in the midst of all a low, shabby little house whose weather-worn paint had once been brown. Sybil gazed at it in wonder, and could scarcely suppress a cry. Damascus had brought her to the Hermit's!

And Damascus behaved quite as if he had intended all along to bring her there! Although he was still breathing heavily, he stepped up to the front of the house, where there was an old mounting-stand of three wooden steps and a small platform. There he stood still, turned his head to look around at Sybil, and whinnied softly and persuasively.

But Sybil was too surprised to dismount. She looked up at the house; its windows were closed, except in an upper room and one below; there were no curtains anywhere, and the panes were dusty and covered with cob-

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webs. There was a piazza, but it was evident that no one ever sat upon it; there was not a chair in sight, and the leaves of the past autumn still lay in wind-blown heaps in the corners. There was no open door, as at Montebello; in fact, there was no sign of life about the place, except a thin wisp of bluish smoke that wavered upward from a back chimney.

"Mercy!" Sybil said to herself, "this certainly does look like the habitation of a hermit! I wonder what you do when you call on hermits? Are they cross, or do they politely show you the way home in joy at getting rid of you?" And as no sign of a living presence made itself known, she added, "And how do you call them, I wonder? Do you say 'Mr. Hermit,' as you say 'Mr. President,' or do you just—cough?"

She laughed nervously, and, as an experiment, gave a little cough; nothing happened, so she coughed again. The silence was somehow rather uncanny, and certainly uncomfortable.

"I wish I could roar, like Uncle!" she said, laughing again, but looking nervously around

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her. "Oh, dear! I've *got* to make him come out! I can't, I *can't* stay lost!"

She turned Damascus, and urged him up close to the side of the house; with her little riding whip she managed to reach one of the windows and tap upon the dingy glass until she was afraid of breaking it; but still there was no sign of life from within. Then she rode around to the back of the house, over the weed-grown path. As she passed the open windows it seemed to her that something or someone stirred within; but she could not bring herself to stop and look into an open window of a stranger's house, although she could easily have surveyed the whole room from the height of Damascus's back.

The kitchen door stood open; and, while she was wondering whether to call or not, an old gray-haired negro came from the woodshed at the back of the yard, his arms full of wood.

He stopped abruptly at sight of the girl on horseback, who must indeed have looked strange enough with her home-made, unfashionably full riding-skirt, her white waist, the tumbled mass of brown curls, and the little hand holding the goldmounted riding-whip

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of a by-gone generation. For a moment the old man stood looking up at her, as at a vision ; then, to Sybil's horror, with a sound between a moan and a shriek, he dropped his wood, sank to his knees, raised his clasped hands in supplication, and bowed his head to the ground.

"Oh, glory! Oh, glory! Oh, please, Miss ha'nt, go 'way from yer! Glory, glory! I *is* a sinner, an' I *knows* I *is*! But, oh, my soul! I ain't done nothin' deservin' a vis'tation! I ain't done nothin' bad enough to make de daid rise from de grave! I ain't done nothin' to bring on de day o' jedgmint! Glory! Glory!"

Damascus snorted and jumped, and Sybil, startled at the amazing demonstration, almost lost her balance ; then another man, evidently aroused by the strange clamor, looked out of one of the open windows, came hurriedly through the house, and ran out of the kitchen.

Sybil remembered afterwards that his tall figure was stooped, as if he had bent over a desk or table for too many hours of his life. His white hair was worn rather long, and a white beard partially concealed his face. But there was a curious familiarity about his

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eyes, and the memory of them haunted her for long, like a half-remembered face, or one she had seen a long while before.

At the moment of his appearance, however, she had no time for speculation; he had started toward the groveling figure of the negro, but the splendid horse and his rider made a picture more compelling. Sybil opened her lips to speak, but once more the strange, disquieting thing happened. As he looked, the Hermit's face went pale; then he tottered, fell back against the side of the door, threw his hands out before him, and gasped her name:

"Sybilla!"

The old negro rocked and moaned. "Yas, sir! Yas, sir, Marse John! Hit's Miss Sybilla! De daid done rose again, an' de jedg-mint-day's at hand! I is a sinner, yes, I is, but oh! my soul! I don't deserve dis vis'tation!"

So she was being mistaken for a ghost! That was it! Sybil felt herself tried beyond endurance. The wild ride on Damascus had been enough; but to believe herself lost, then to find that she was at the Hermit's house—those two facts would have been enough ex-

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citement for any day! Yet now she was being taken for a ghost, or, worse, a visitation! A visitation, indeed—when she had the very best intentions in the world toward the Hermit and everybody else—even if she did have to confess to a little curiosity! Why on earth should they take her for an apparition, and above all, why, *why* did everyone gasp out her name in that very unpleasant way at first sight of her?

She felt her cheeks beginning to burn. "Of course it's Sybilla!" she said, sharply, with flashing eyes. "Why on earth shouldn't it be Sybilla? My name is Sybil Crawford, but I don't see what there is in that to alarm anybody!"

Slowly the old man in the doorway was recovering his senses; he brushed his hand across his eyes, and his face became less pale. Slowly, too, the old negro looked up into Sybil's face and arose. Slowly he came toward Damascus, step by step, hesitating, evidently ready to run at the first sign of danger. He held his hands out before him, like a person groping his way through the dark. He touched the horse's neck, then Sybil's skirt, then the tip of her shoe. Then he clapped

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his hands together, and raised his voice in a curious singsong of exultation and relief.

"Glory! Glory halleluya! Marse John! Marse John! Dis yer ain't no ha'nt! Ner it ain't no vis'tation! Dis yer's *alive*!"

Sybil could not stand any more of it, and flicked Damascus with the whip. She was glad when the trying old darkey had to jump back out of the way. The situation had been really too grotesque! To have them take her for a ghost! She would just show them how alive she was!

She assumed her most grown-up and impressive manner, and bowed to the old gentleman, who still had not spoken.

"I am sorry to have trespassed. I am sorry to have been the cause of such great alarm!" she said, in her sternest tone and with all the dignity she could command, conscious as she was, all the time, of her dishevelled appearance and the actual absurdity of the scene just past. "If you will have your man set me on the road to Montebello, I shall be greatly obliged, and will not trouble you further." Then she added what she considered an inspired masterpiece, "And my uncle shall send you our apologies to-morrow!"

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She thought the speech sounded tremendously well. At any rate, she had the satisfaction of seeing that it made its impression on the Hermit, for as she spoke the color returned to his face and he stepped forward, bowing courteously, with a charming, old-fashioned grace, as he came.

"It is I who must apologize," he said. "We two old men who live alone are unaccustomed to calls from charming young ladies; the surprise was too much for us! May we not make amends by offering you some hospitality?"

There was something peculiarly winning about his smile, and Sybil trusted him at once, partly because, as she afterwards wrote Donald, his eyes had such a gentle, withdrawn look, as if he had stepped aside from the world and were watching it go by, unenvious, unafraid, and patiently waiting.

She could not help responding to his smile. "Thank you," she said. "I shall be very much obliged if you will set me on my way home. Damascus ran away with me, and neither of us know where we are!"

"You can be home in ten minutes, if you like," the Hermit assured her. "Daniel here will guide you, if you prefer; but I should like

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to do it myself. But pray let me offer some refreshment, first."

Daniel had anticipated his master's wish, and was already bringing a tray with a glass of milk and one of water.

Sybil chose the milk. "It is delicious," she said. "But, really and truly, I must get back. My uncle will be anxious, I'm afraid."

The Hermit waved toward the grass-grown road. "This way, then, please! I will walk beside you. You—I think you said—your—*uncle*—would be anxious?"

She nodded. "Colonel Crockett, you know! I am visiting at Montebello."

"Your—uncle?"

Sybil wondered why he should seem so surprised at the relationship. "He is not really my uncle, of course," she explained. "My father, Doctor Robert Crawford, is his cousin."

The Hermit's eyes had a curious look, as if he were trying to make out something that was very far away. "And—your name, then, is—Sybilla Crawford! Sybilla!"

They talked on, and Sybil liked the Hermit more and more. He seemed very glad to talk

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with her, as simply and unaffectedly glad as a child might have been.

There are some people with whom one might talk forever without becoming friends, and without coming to know them any better than at first; but the Hermit was certainly not one of these. By the time he had led Damascus to an opening through the woods which would take her directly back to Montebello, Sybil felt that they had become such good friends that she ventured to say, smiling down at him:

"I have been told that people around here call you 'the Hermit'! But I'm sure we shall be friends, if you will let me, and I couldn't call a friend of mine that!"

The old man smiled up at her. "Ah! They call me a hermit, do they? Ah, well! I suppose no man can hope to remain nameless; and indeed, if a hermit is one who meditates in lonely places, the name fits me well enough!" He sighed, but seeming to remember her hint, added, "The only other friend I have, my good old Daniel, calls me 'Mr. John.' Perhaps you, also, will call me by that name."

She was longing to know more than his

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first name, but of course it was impossible to ask.

"Thank you, Mr. John," she said, smiling and holding out her hand. "I am sorry I startled you and Daniel, and I hope you will let me visit you again."

The Hermit looked, for a moment, as if he were going to refuse. Then he squared his shoulders a little, and said, "My dear young lady, you are very good! I shall be honored by your friendship!"

Then he bade her good-bye. As she guided Damascus toward home, her mind was busy with wonder and speculation. She knew she could not have seen the Hermit before; why was it that she could not shake off the impression of having known him? And why did so kindly and gentle an old man live there alone, apparently even more cut off from the neighborhood than was the household of Montebello? Surely it was not of his own choosing—he was not the sort to want to avoid his kind! And even more surely it could not be because of any crime or wrong he had committed! Even to think of such a thing in connection with him was ridiculous, when she recalled his kindly eyes and gentle

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manner. What old story was hidden with him, in the little, neglected house scarcely two miles from Montebello?

Thinking of these things again, when she was alone in her room that night, she wrote to Donald:

He has the best and kindest face I ever saw in my life, except Dad's. It is so kind and sweet that it just seems to glow upon you and make you warm and comfortable and happy all through. But somehow, Don, it seems as if that beautiful kindness must have come because he has suffered very much indeed.

Miss Sophia came in, while she was writing, to bid her good-night, and assure herself that there were to be no ill effects from the runaway. Sybil looked up at her over her letter.

"Cousin Sophia," she asked, "who is Mr. John?"

The little lady was carrying a brass candlestick in one hand and a glass of water in the other. At Sybil's question she jumped so that the water splashed to the floor, and the flame of the candle waved dangerously. Her

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face suddenly grew white, and her eyes looked as the Hermit's had that afternoon before Sybil spoke. Then, without a word of reply, she turned and trotted out of the room!

XI

THE COLONEL MAKES A CALL

WELL, young lady," said the Colonel to Sybil, when she came into the dining-room one morning a week or so later, "what part of the country do you mean to explore on that wild beast of yours this morning? I suppose there'll be no keeping you inside the gates of Montebello now that you have gotten used to Damascus!"

Until now, he had firmly forbidden her going off the place, and Sybil had been secretly longing to see what there was in the country round about. She had never dared to tell him all the details of her first wild ride.

"Oh, do you really mean that you'll let me?" she cried, her eyes dancing with excitement.

"Humph!" said the Colonel. "Let you, indeed! Don't suppose there'll be any holding you!"

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She pretended to look very much hurt. "I am very, very sorry, Uncle," she said, looking down at her plate to hide the twinkle in her eyes, "that you have found me such a disobedient—er—chit—I think is your word! You must be finding your experiment a good deal of a failure!"

Miss Sophia never by any chance saw a joke, and the jocular passages between her brother and their guest still troubled her as greatly as they had on the first day. "Oh, Brother! Pray, Brother! Oh, my dear Sybil—oh, my *dear!*" she now cried, looking from one to the other in great distress.

"Sophia," said the Colonel, leaning toward her, his hands grasping the edge of the dining-table, "Sophia, have we found my experiment a failure? Have we? Hey?"

"Oh, Brother! Why, Brother, how can you?" Miss Sophia protested, almost in tears.

Sybil had to jump up and run around the table, to kiss her into reassurance again, while the Colonel chuckled.

"Oh, well," he said, "the experiment's not at an end yet, so we'll hope for the best. Meanwhile, you ladies will be prepared to go calling with me this afternoon."

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If he had exploded a bomb in the midst of the breakfast dishes, he could not have caused greater consternation. Jinny was just bringing in a plate of hot waffles; she stopped so suddenly that Shem, following with the coffee-pot, bumped into her with disastrous results to Aunt Sair' Ann's golden-brown honey-combed beauties. Jinny fled, but old Shem stood as if rooted to the spot, staring at his master. Sybil stood up and looked at the Colonel over Miss Sophia's head, and the little lady grew quite pale.

The old gentleman calmly poured some cream over his strawberries, and pretended to be entirely unaware of the commotion he had caused. But as no one spoke, he was obliged at last to look up, and ask, with raised eyebrows:

"Well?"

"You are not by any chance dreaming, are you, Uncle?" Sybil asked; she knew that he dearly loved her little flippancies.

"Not with these white strawberries in front of me," he said. "Better sit down and have some, my dear."

Sybil went back to her place and took the little silver cream pitcher he passed her.

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"Well, if strawberries and cream are good eye-openers, I'll have some, too," she said. "I think it must have been I who was dreaming, Uncle, because I really thought I heard you say something about going calling this afternoon."

"That's just what I said, Miss," the Colonel declared, with a chuckle. He was fully aware of Shem's rolling eyes, and of Jinny's precipitous flight; he was having a very good time.

"Brother!" Miss Sophia cried, in a voice of alarm and pleading.

"Now what's the matter with you, Sophia?" the Colonel demanded. "Can't you behave like a sensible woman? What is there remarkable in our all going out to make some calls? Can you tell me you don't *owe* any? Can you tell me that? Hey?"

Miss Sophia sank back in her chair. "Brother! It's been forty——" she began; but the Colonel cut short her protest.

He brought his fist down on the table with a bang. "Then it's all the more reason why we make them to-day!" he roared.

And make them they did! The carriage was ordered for half past two, and promptly

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on the minute the Colonel, with Miss Sophia and Sybil, drove off in state, first of all to return the Rutherfords' visit.

As they turned into the Fordham gate, the Colonel seemed deeply moved, and kept his face toward the window, pretending that the white silk handkerchief which had replaced his usual bandanna was being used only to "shoo off" the gnats. Sybil knew he was thinking of another Sybilla, to whom this place must have been so familiar and so dearly loved. Once more her mind was busy, wondering what could have kept him and his sister so long separated from their neighbors; and Miss Sophia's thoughts were evidently somewhat the same, but for once the little lady's excitement was stronger than her timidity.

"O dear, O dear," she cried, "how this does bring back old times!"

The Colonel jumped. "Nothing of the kind!" he growled. "Nothing of the kind! Nothing here to remind anyone of anything! Do try to behave like a sensible woman, Sophia!"

Miss Sophia clasped her mittened hands in

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her lap, and murmured, "O dear, O dear! Oh, Brother!"

But Sybil laughed. "Don't get excited, Uncle beautiful and dear," she said. "There! Now you've twisted your necktie out of place!"

The old gentleman set his lips tightly together to restrain a smile while he bent forward to be put in order; and Sybil had not finished retying the bow to her satisfaction when the carriage stopped before the Fordham steps, and Mr. Rutherford was opening the door.

He sent forth a hearty laugh when he beheld the little domestic scene within.

"Oh ho! So you've tamed the lion, have you, Miss Sybil? Ah, William, these young folks know how to keep us in order!"

The Colonel was red with embarrassment, and flapped at Sybil's hand with his handkerchief. "Nothing of the kind! Nothing of the kind!" he exclaimed. "Stop that, you minx! Get away!"

At which Mr. Rutherford laughed all the more, while Sybil and Miss Sophia were led off by Molly to meet her mother.

The two old men must have found a great

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deal to say, for when Molly and Sybil came back they were sitting close together on a bench in the sun, so absorbed in each other as to be unaware of the girls' approach; so Molly drew Sybil down to the piazza steps.

"We won't disturb them," she said. "Just think how many years it has been since they have had a real good talk!"

Sybil's face was very thoughtful. "I don't know how he has endured his loneliness," she said. "Why, Molly, he's the friendliest soul alive, and as companionable as if he were a girl of our age! We've become regular chums!"

Molly smiled. "In spite of his temper?" she laughed. "They say that is something frightful."

Sybil joined in the laugh. "It is rather peppery," she admitted. "But when he behaves very badly, I just treat him as if he were one of my younger brothers. It works beautifully!"

"Oh, Sybil! How do you ever dare?"

"Oh, he loves it! But—Molly, I have something to tell you!"

Molly jumped. "You've seen the Hermit!"

"Yes, I have." She recounted her adven-

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ture on Damascus, ending with, "Now what do you suppose is the meaning of it all, Molly?"

Molly shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "I asked Grandfather, once, who the Hermit was, and what do you suppose he answered?"

"I can't imagine!"

"No, you certainly couldn't! He said—he said, 'Ah, little Moll, the War is over, but its battles are not all won or lost!'"

Sybil's eyes showed that she did not understand. "What on earth did he mean by that? What war is over? Why, every war is over!"

Molly shook her head, with a queer, sad little smile. "There is only one war that anyone in the South ever calls 'the War.'"

"The Civil War?"

Molly bent her head.

"But—but that was—mercy!—that was about fifty years ago!"

"Fifty years, or yesterday, it's all the same with our people."

"Then you think your grandfather meant to say that this mystery dates from the War?"

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"Yes. I am quite sure that is what he meant."

The girls were silent for a while, each busy with her own thoughts. Then Molly said:

"I have never seen your friend the Hermit, myself, and I do not know anyone but you who has. But of course all the boys and girls in this part of the country have wondered about him, and asked about him, and tried to unravel the mystery about him, ever since they could walk and talk! Yet all that our united curiosity has been able to discover is that an old man whose name is never spoken lives alone in that little house."

"And that, as far as having friends is concerned, Colonel Crockett and Miss Sophia live alone in theirs!"

Molly looked at her with wide-opened eyes of amazement. "Gracious! You don't suppose there is anything more than a coincidence there, do you?"

"I am not so sure," Sybil said, thoughtfully.

"Oh, but—but I've always believed that the Colonel had just quarreled—or something—with everybody—and——"

"Well, I'm going to cultivate Mr. John's

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acquaintance, anyway, and we'll see what comes of it!"

Molly laughed. "And I am going to cultivate the Colonel's, you darling, so that I can see a lot of *you*!"

"I hope you will," said Sybil, "for I really believe you've already begun to reform him. He is going calling this afternoon!"

Molly's eyes were wide, indeed, at that. "What? Not calling at other places than this?"

"Yes, really! Cousin Sophia almost fainted when he ordered us to get ready!"

"I don't wonder! Why, he has not been in any house but his own, nor admitted any-one to Montebello, in the memory of man!"

Sybil laughed. "Your coming has broken the ice! I shouldn't be surprised if the dear old darling turns out to be a regular beau in his old age!"

The girls laughed at the prospect, and they had occasion to laugh again, later on, when the party from Montebello had taken their places in the carriage, and the Colonel gave the order to Japhet to drive to "Mon Plaisir," for Major Rutherford's face, as he heard the words, was a veritable study in amazement.

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Yet the surprise of the Rutherfords was as nothing compared to that of the other people on whom the Colonel made calls that afternoon. It was a difficult proceeding for the old gentleman, and as they went from place to place Sybil really felt sorry for him. At every house it was more or less the same. First the servants, or the members of the family who happened to be sitting on the verandas, had to be faced, and made to understand that it was really Colonel Crockett who had come. Then, where there were people of his own generation and Miss Sophia's, there was the same little scene, with variations, of course, but always pathetic.

One of these Sybil never forgot. It was at Major Nicholson's house, and an amazed negro had hastily withdrawn to announce them. Miss Sophia and Sybil were seated; but the Colonel awaited his hosts as a soldier should. Miss Nicholson came in first; then the old gentleman. One sleeve of his coat was pinned back, empty from the elbow.

He came easily forward with a smile and a near-sighted stare, until close enough to make out the identity of his guests. Then the two old men stood facing each other, breath-

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ing heavily. At last the host held out his hand.

"William!" he said; and his voice was shaking.

The Colonel grasped the outstretched hand and said, in a voice that also trembled, "Dick! Dick! I've been very wrong——"

"No," the other cried, "not wrong, old friend! We all make mistakes——"

"You can't find an excuse for mine! My pride made a coward of me!"

Major Nicholson held out the arm which ended in the folded sleeve. "Bill!" he cried, "d'ye see that? D'ye think I'll let you call yourself a coward, old friend, when our Robert himself wrote of your conspicuous bravery in his despatches, the day you carried me back of the lines through the cross—the day I lost this? No! There never was a coward in the Crockett family!"

The Colonel fell back, and his face grew darkly red. But Major Nicholson laid his hand on the Colonel's shoulder and said:

"Forgive me, William, if I hurt! But I mean it! On my honor, as a gentleman, I mean every word of it! And I had to say it!"

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Once more the two shook hands. "All right, Dick; all right! Let there be an end of it!"

"If there must be," the Major said, with a sad little shake of the head. "I'm afraid I'd pay a higher price than silence, old comrade, to welcome you here once more!"

The Colonel turned to Sybil with a smile. "It's this minx, here, has brought us calling," he said. "Didn't like the quiet way we two old people lived! Wants more life about the place! Old foggy like me not enough! Thinks I ought to give a ball for her!"

Sybil's eyes were opened wide in protest at that. "Why, Uncle Crockett!" she was beginning, while Miss Sophia's tears stopped immediately and everyone looked expectantly at the Colonel.

"'Why, Uncle,' is it?" the old gentleman said, nodding at his friend as if he alone would understand the joke. "'Why, Uncle! Hear that, Dick? Do your young ladies treat you that way, too? Tyrants, that's what they are, tyrants! Make us give 'em balls, and—and things!"

"Oh!" cried Sybil, too amazed to say anything more.

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"What? Mean to say you didn't know I *was* going to give you a ball? Well, well, I suppose I did forget to mention it!"

It was, after all, only the first afternoon on which the three sallied forth to renew the acquaintance of the old friends whom the Colonel and Miss Sophia had so long neglected, for some reason utterly beyond Sybil's imagination. But after the first day they were somewhat differently received, for news travels in swift, mysterious ways in the country, and everyone had heard how Colonel Crockett had come forth from his retirement, and had a young niece visiting at Montebello, and was going to give a ball in her honor. Sybil was surprised at the number of young people there were in the neighborhood. When the Colonel had called at all the big "places," they even journeyed to the nearest town, St. Anne, and stopped at several stately mansions there.

Needless to say, the days which followed were very different from the earlier ones. People were only too glad to come once more to Montebello—the older generation because it had been closed to them so long, and because of the sweet memories which were still

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associated with it; the younger ones to meet the girl from the north who had brought the Crocketts from their retirement of forty years or more. Sybil might have been the young lady of the manor, so many were the attentions showered upon her. The Colonel's ball was almost three weeks off, but the interval was crowded with drives and riding parties, little dances and "teas," which were really suppers with an enormous variety of good things to eat.

Miss Sophia was in a constant flutter of pleasant excitement. "You are going to be a belle, my dear," she declared to Sybil, one afternoon, when a crowd of girls and young men had come back with her from a riding party, and departed after a feast of cakes and lemonade. "I declare, it's like old times to see all these young people around! O, dearie dear, I never expected to have such a good time again in my life, never!"

"Nor I!" Sybil cried. "It is perfectly wonderful! I can't help thinking, though, Cousin Sophia, of the twins, and how they *would* enjoy it all! And darling Donald!"

But at that, curiously enough, Miss Sophia

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looked almost alarmed, and jumped up, saying:

"O dear! O dear! I forgot to tell Aunt Sair' Ann about the spoon-bread for supper!" and trotted away.

Sybil laughed, and started into the house to change her riding habit; but in the hall she came face to face with the Colonel, who hastily put his hand behind his back when he saw her.

She laughed again, and shook her finger at him. "You secretive old darling!" she said. "You're trying to hide something from me! Now, what is it?"

The Colonel frowned. "Nothing of the kind, nothing of the kind," he said. "Don't be so suspicious, miss! Bad trait, bad trait!"

She tried to jump around back of him, to see whatever it was that he was hiding, but the Colonel was not going to be taken by surprise. He turned as she did, and tried to disguise his amusement with a frown. "Minx!" he cried. "You little minx! Scat! Shoo! Scat! Upstairs with you!"

Laughing merrily, she ran upstairs; but half way up she paused on a landing, and

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bent over the banister. The Colonel was looking up at her, and blew her a kiss.

But Sybil had suddenly turned serious. "Uncle," she asked, "would you mind telling me what *does* make you so good to me?"

The old gentleman's eyebrows began to work in his most terrifying manner, and he shook his head quite fiercely. He even stamped his foot!

"Shoo! Shoo! Scat!" he cried, as if trying to frighten away a too-playful kitten; and Sybil ran off to her room, laughing, but with a laugh which was very near tears.

XII

SYBIL'S QUESTION

ALTHOUGH Sybil often remembered the intention she had declared to Molly of cultivating the Hermit's acquaintance, it was several days before she had a chance of going again to the little brown house in the woods. Every afternoon, for a while, was taken up by making and receiving calls, and later by the gaieties that all the people in the neighborhood vied with each other in making for her. Then, too, the more time she gave to others, the less she had to spare from the demands of home—as she was already beginning to think of Montebello. Miss Sophia was becoming daily more dependent upon her for help and advice; she fell into the way of running to her at all hours, with, “My dear, which would you order for tea?” or, “My dear, do you think the Miss Johnsons would like some of this?” or, “Aunt Sair’

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Ann thinks we had better have that. What do *you* think?" or else a question, trivial enough in itself, but, oh, so momentous to the little lady, so difficult to decide, about a ribbon or a brooch, a lawn dress or a dimity! Sybil often wondered what on earth Miss Sophia had done before she came; but it was impossible not to see the pathos of it. How lonely the dear soul must have been, and what effort and courage it must have cost her, all these years, to make the little decisions for herself! The Colonel, too, claimed more and more of her time and attention. It seemed almost as if he could not bear to have her long out of his sight. If she were off with some of the young people, he would be awaiting her return on the piazza, or even down by the gate; if she were up in her room, she would find him wandering about the hall when she came down, pretending to be looking for something which was right under his nose! If Miss Sophia had carried her off, he would be in one of his tempers when she came back to him; if it were only an hour or two that she had been away, he would grumble as fiercely as if she had been gone a month! He was constantly devising little

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schemes for her amusement; and even while she pretended not to understand what he was up to, Sybil could not help being amused and touched. It was just a case of trying to cut out everyone else!

Then, as the weeks went on, even the servants were becoming dependent upon her, as was after all natural enough, since both the Colonel and Miss Sophia submitted every little detail to her judgment, considered her pleasure in everything. Not a day passed but Aunt Sair' Ann would call her down to the kitchen for a taste of this or advice about that; and Shem would come to her for one thing and Jinny for another, and Torm's little brown children would trot up in the mornings for lessons, or to bring a bunch of daisies to "Missy." In the little more than two months of her stay among them she had drawn all their hearts to her in a devotion that made them forget she had not always belonged there; and even to herself it sometimes seemed that this must always have been her home, and the life in the beloved family in South Wickham only a long and well-remembered dream.

But Damascus had to be exercised regu-

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larly, and Sybil would permit no one but herself to ride him. As the days grew warmer, the Colonel went with her less frequently; and whenever she got a chance to go out alone she managed to pay a little visit to Mr. John.

It was not long before they had become great friends. There was a deprecating gentleness about the old man's manner that deeply appealed to Sybil, and she soon found that her talks with him were as interesting as those she used to have with Dad, on their long drives together among the Massachusetts hills. She guessed that the Hermit—for so she always called him in her thoughts—had never been a man of action, but one of thought. He was a student, and she never saw him without a book in his hand or pocket; and whereas at Montebello the bookcase doors were seldom opened and there was never a magazine or new book to be seen, the Hermit's dusty table was piled with a varied assortment, even to a foreign review or two, and several scientific papers and University pamphlets. He knew far more of the affairs of the world than the Colonel did; for the Colonel's principal reading was a Baltimore

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paper, some farm journals, and the Hagerstown Almanac. Both old men had dropped out of life, as it was lived by their neighbors, whose families grew up about them, who met each other at their homes or at political meetings and church. But Colonel Crockett had busied himself with his great farm and his horses and dogs; and Mr. John had dwelt among books. The result was naturally very different. Her uncle was a ruddy and vigorous man in spite of his recurring spasms of gout, as energetic in his actions as in his words. The Hermit was a gentle philosopher, who let the days pass by with no effort to make an impression of his own upon them.

There was a low, weather-worn bench which was a favorite seat of his. He had built it on a little rise of ground among a growth of pine and scrub oak so dense as almost wholly to screen it; yet a person sitting there could see the red roof of Montebello, and the tops of its surrounding trees, and look far over the waters of the Chesapeake, to the gray sails of the oystermen's canoes flashing in the sunlight, and watch the little steamer round the bend into Cherry-

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pit Inlet. The Hermit spent many hours in that secluded spot, and there he often talked with Sybil.

She had been telling him, one day, how she had come to love the life and the people at Montebello, and was beginning to feel as if she had always belonged there.

The Hermit was looking towards the distant red roof. "That is because Montebello has needed you so long, my dear," he said. "You did not have to make your place there; it was waiting for you."

Sybil's eyes became misty. "Everything about the dear old place seems to make its appeal to me," she said, "even its quiet and loneliness. I wish I could have known it before the war, when it must have been brimming with life!"

Mr. John drew a quick breath, as if a sudden pain had stabbed him.

"You knew it then, did you not?" Sybil pursued, on a sudden impulse.

"I knew it then," he replied sadly.

"I suppose the war must have wrecked it; my friend, Molly Rutherford, has told me all sorts of stories of what the war did."

The Hermit's hand was clasped very tightly

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about the little brown book on his knee. "This county was not a battlefield," he said, slowly, as if he were weighing his words. "But the suffering was as great as if it had been. The negroes left the growing crops in the fields and went away; the people gave everything—their horses, their cattle, their blankets—to the army; the women even melted their silver, and sent their jewels to be sold."

After a while Sybil added, "And the men all went away to the war!"

It seemed an innocent enough remark; but the Hermit arose, and, with a groan, threw his arms above his head. Then, with no further words to Sybil, he groped his way back to the house, walking as if the world had suddenly grown dark.

Riding back to Montebello that day, she had much to think about. Her visits to the Hermit had not been secret; she had told Miss Sophia that her rides often led her there, and Miss Sophia had gently wept, and trotted out of the room, later to return and ask a trembling question or two that made Sybil think she must at some time have known Mr. John. Molly Rutherford wove a

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charming ante-bellum romance out of this, to Sybil's somewhat sceptical amusement.

But Miss Sophia had also said: "If I were you, I wouldn't speak to Brother about—about—you *know*, my dear! There is no harm in your going there; but you might excite dear Brother if you told him about it!"

So, although until now Sybil had said nothing to her Uncle about her new friend, to-day she resolved to do so. She planned several ways of breaking it to him, for she knew that he always objected to everything out of his usual routine, and she was sure she should have to face and overcome an explosion; yet it did not seem fair any longer to have a secret of that sort from him. Their daily increasing affection and friendship for each other made a demand which she could not conscientiously ignore; and, besides, she could not help suspecting that there was more in the Hermit's seclusion than at first sight appeared. But, as so often happens when we make plans for other people, her disclosure came about in an unexpected manner, and the result was entirely unforeseen. In fact, it was one of the great surprises of her life.

June was almost at its close; every win-

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dow and door was open, inviting the breeze from the Bay; and after supper the Colonel sat in his big rocking chair on the piazza, his head bare, his pipe in his mouth, a picture of ease and satisfaction. He was listening to Sybil and Miss Sophia singing some of his favorite, old-fashioned songs at the square piano in the drawing-room. It had been years since the piano was opened, until Sybil came. Now not a day passed without its music being heard in the old house. Presently Miss Sophia went away with Jinny, to see one of Torm's babies, who was sick; and Sybil came and stood in the doorway, her white dress gleaming against the twilight of the hall.

The Colonel held out his hand to her. "Come out and watch the moon rise, little girl," he said, in his gentlest tone.

She seated herself on the step at his feet, where the Colonel could rest his hand on her brown curls. He loved to have her there; and she loved to sit where she could look out across the acres of lawn to the distant gleam of the great Bay. Presently the moon would rise from the waters, as already a pale radiance on the horizon made announcement. Her thoughts took flight to the beloved family

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in South Wickham, and she wondered whether any of those of the doctor's household were watching for the moon to come up over East Mountain. She could imagine the chatter of the twins, and the murmur of Mother-dear's sweet voice talking to Dad or Hallam or dear old Dick. A lump of homesickness rose in her throat, not to be dispelled even by Aunt Sair' Ann's voice coming around from the kitchen, in the long-drawn-out, wailing music of her favorite old "spiritual." The words of the song came clearly on the stillness of the night, their wistful, sweet appeal in perfect accord with the evening.

I wa-a-a-ant ter stan' whar Moses stood,
A-viewi-i-in' de lan'scape o'er;
Not Jo-o-ordan's stream, nor death's col' flood,
Kin pa-a-a-art me from dat shore!

And Shem's quavering voice joined in the refrain with a peculiar harmony of his own composing:

'Membe-e-er de rich, 'membe-e-er de poor!
'Member de bound an' de free!
An' when you git done a-'memb'rin all aroun',
Good Lord, den 'member—me!

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The song died away as Sair' Ann and Shem went off together to their own little cabin beyond the stable; and, still dreaming, Sybil watched the bright star in the east grow paler as the moon rose. Then a hoot-owl's weird call brought her thoughts back to things nearer at hand.

"There's the little owl!" she said. "We have heard him every night for a week."

"Yes," said the Colonel, who had been content to watch the brown head close to his knee, and to wonder what thoughts were passing there. "Yes, he's calling from the big oak down yonder at the edge of the lawn. Funny little fellow, isn't he?"

"He sounds so lonely!" Sybil said pityingly.

The Colonel laughed. "I reckon he's only hungry!"

She looked up over her shoulder at him in laughing protest. "Oh, Uncle, don't! I'd rather think of him as being lonely than just hungry! It's so much more picturesque, so much more—romantic!"

But the Colonel shook his head; he evidently could not agree to that. "No! There is nothing romantic about loneliness, little girl! You may take my word for that!"

SYBIL'S QUESTION

She turned so that she could rest her hand on the broad arm of his rocking chair. "You aren't lonely any more, though, are you, Uncle Lovely?" she asked, looking up at him with her head on one side.

"Humph!" said the Colonel, trying his best to sound exasperated. "Don't get a chance to be, with a saucy minx of a girl following me 'round the place from morn till night!"

"But you are dreadfully sorry for anyone who *is* lonely, aren't you, Uncle Beautiful?"

"Humph! Don't know why I should be! I found a way to get over it; so can anyone else!"

"Well, you needn't take all the credit to yourself, Uncle Bear; because, if I hadn't taken pity on you and come down here, you'd still be lonely, wouldn't you?"

The old gentleman put his hand over hers, where it rested on the arm of his chair. "Might have been better off!" he growled.

Sybil laughed. "Oh, aren't you ashamed of yourself!" she cried. "Anyway, I *was* sorry for you! My heart just wobbled with pity when I thought you and Cousin Sophia hadn't a soul on earth to look after you! And that's how I feel towards everybody who is all alone

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

in the world. Why, just think of living in a little old house, 'way off in the woods, a house without even a road leading up to it, and with nothing but books and sky and trees and grass and the Bay and one old servant to keep you company! Just think of knowing that people for miles around don't even know your name, just think——”

But the Colonel interrupted her with a question that came out as sharply as a shot from a pistol. “Stop!” he commanded. Then, “What are you talking about?”

Her heart began to beat faster; but she knew better than to exhibit the least sign of fear.

“I am talking of my friend, the Hermit” she replied very quietly.

For fully a minute the Colonel did not speak; he looked at her face, then out across the lawn to the moon-lit water. At last, just when she was expecting a storm of roars and thumps, he asked, in a voice as quiet as her own:

“What do you know of him?”

“I do not know anything at all, except that he is a dear, gentle old man, and the saddest and loneliest person I ever saw. I found his

SYBIL'S QUESTION

house by accident, the day Damascus ran away with me. Since then we have become good friends."

She expected the old gentleman to protest, but he only watched her silently.

"Uncle, there is something about his living there, so close to Montebello, so separated from it—from everything—that I do not understand. I—I cannot help feeling that it ought not to be so. He is good; I am sure he can never have done anything wrong. Uncle, I cannot help feeling that there is something strange in his seclusion, something that ought not to be!"

The Colonel arose, pushed back his chair, and ran his hand backward over his white hair. Sybil stood up, too, and raised her face to look into his; but he continued to gaze across the water. She could see that he was deeply moved. She put her hand on his arm.

"Uncle, why does Mr. John live there alone, and why did you and Cousin Sophia live here alone before I came? Who is he? What does it all mean?"

The Colonel's lips were trembling. "He is an outcast!" he said hoarsely.

But Sybil had thought a great deal about

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

what Molly's grandfather had said. "Uncle dear," she said very gently, very pleadingly, "Molly Rutherford's grandfather said once, when Molly asked about the Hermit, that the war was over, but its battles not all lost or won. Won't you tell me, please, what he meant?"

At first it seemed as if the Colonel had not heard her question; but after a while he turned, looked at her, then put his two hands on the sides of her head caressingly, tenderly, and turned her face up toward his own.

It was the surprise of her life to see that there were tears in his eyes. "Little girl," he said, his voice trembling, "Sybilla! O, I wish you were my daughter!"

Then he turned abruptly and walked into the house. She listened to his step in the hall, then to the closing of the library door:

XIII

THE COLONEL SPRINGS A SURPRISE

THE wonderful evening of her talk with the Colonel was followed, dismally enough, by a week of rain. She was beginning to feel that another day indoors would make her too cross for endurance, when she awoke one morning with the sun streaming across the floor of her room, and Jinny standing beside the bed with a tiny folded note.

DEAREST SYBIL (she read), Can you ride Damascus over this afternoon and stay to tea? Tell the Colonel that we will send someone home with you. I have a surprise for you—and you may spend the hours between now and afternoon in guessing what it is, without even growing “warm”

Yours, MOLLY.

Sybil laughed over it while she was dressing. “‘Ride Damascus over,’” she said, read-

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

ing aloud. "That's Molly's polite little way of inviting me alone! I wonder what it is! I wonder—I do wonder whether she has found out anything about the Hermit!"

Needless to say, she did not show Molly's note to the Colonel or Miss Sophia. Instead, she asked as casually as she could:

"Well, what are you going to do to-day, Uncle, now that the rain is over?"

But the bad weather seemed to have affected the old gentleman's temper most grievously. "I'm going to attend to my own affairs, Miss!" he snapped, quite in his original manner.

Sybil's eyebrows went up. "Oh, really? How nice that will be!" she said. "Then we'll both have a good time!"

She did not notice that his mouth was twitching, nor that he winked at Miss Sophia. "Hey?" he demanded fiercely. "How's that? How's that?"

But Sybil, all unaware of his attempt at concealing something, felt that this was an occasion where discipline was demanded, so she ignored his question and spoke to Miss Sophia. "If you don't mind, Cousin Sophia, I am going to Fordham for supper," she said.

A SURPRISE

"Someone from there will ride home with me."

Miss Sophia was evidently alarmed or embarrassed at something; she poured the tea into the sugar bowl instead of into a cup. "O dear! O dear! Oh—but perhaps you'd better not go *to-day*, dear!" she said.

Before Sybil, in her surprise, could ask a question, the Colonel pushed his chair back from the table and cried:

"Oh, never mind, Sophia! Let her go, let her go, let her go!" and stamped out of the room in a genuine fury.

Sybil looked at Miss Sophia with wide-opened eyes of surprise. "What on earth is the matter with Uncle?" she asked. "Do you suppose he really wants me to stay home?"

But Miss Sophia's reply was as vague as usual, and Sybil put it down to the bad weather and gout.

But although she did spend the interval in guessing, the surprise proved a genuine one. A tall masculine form was beside Molly on the Fordham piazza, waiting to greet her.

"This is my brother Jack, Sybil," said Molly, dimpling; then, as they were shaking hands, something inside the hallway attracted

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

Sybil's attention, and in an instant she knew all about Molly's surprise.

"Donald!" she cried wildly; and then, to her own later disgust and Donald's embarrassment, she had her arms about his neck and was almost strangling him, and exclaiming, and sobbing wildly, while Donald, trying to laugh over the top of her head at the others, thumped her vigorously on the back, to wind up finally with a few hearty shakes that partly stopped her tears.

"Oh, I've wanted to see Dad so badly, and Mother-dear, and"—her sobs almost choked her—"and—everybody—and the—kitten—and—old—Betty——"

But that was the moment that Donald chose for his shaking, and Molly came forward and put her arm about Sybil.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" she cried. "I ought to have known! That's just the way I felt when Jack came over to Geneva last summer, and I wasn't expecting him—wasn't it, Jackie?"

"Sure, even to the flow of tears! Perfectly natural way to feel!" said Jack Rutherford, grinning; and Sybil liked him from that moment.

A SURPRISE

"I'm an awful goose," she said, looking at Donald with eyes that suddenly dropped, abashed at something in his face that she did not understand.

Then Molly took her upstairs to wash away the traces of her emotion, and then she had to tell them all over again how ashamed she was. But supper was ready very soon, for Mrs. Rutherford knew all about young people's appetites; and when they had managed to make away with enough of Clarissy's beaten biscuit and peach marmalade and fried chicken and hard-shelled crabs and oysters and chocolate cake and pickled mangoes to have nourished all four for a week, they went out to the piazza again, the girls to make themselves comfortable in basket chairs, the young men to find places on the steps at their feet.

"I had Unc' Frank paint the canoe, Jack," said Molly. "I knew you wouldn't want to waste a day of your holiday!"

"Whoop!" cried her brother. "Good old girl! I say, Donald, we'll show you some sporty sailing down here!"

"In a canoe?" Sybil asked eagerly. She and Donald and Dick had paddled many

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

hours on the Connecticut; but they had never put up a sail, and she longed for the experience. But Molly laughed.

"Our canoes are not like yours, Sybil!" she explained. "That's what we call the sail boats we have down here. Haven't you noticed them on the Bay?"

"We saw some coming down on the boat to-day, Syb," said Donald. "One mast, sometimes; sometimes two. Queer sails, foreign looking—smaller mast astern."

"But those, I thought, are the oystermen's boats?" Sybil said.

"And everybody's," Jack told her, "that is, everybody who wants a good old Chesapeake sail. We must have an old-time picnic, Moll."

"Oh, I've already promised that Sybil shall hear Unc' Frank sing! Do you think the Colonel will let you come, Sybil?"

"Oh, he'll have to!" Sybil said calmly.

Donald whistled. "Oh, ho! So big sister's in her usual form down here, too, is she?" he teased. "Tamed the lion? Stopped his roars?"

They laughed, but Sybil's chin went up in the air. "That was only my first impression, Donald," she said, with great dignity and a

A SURPRISE

rebuking look. "He's the dearest old gentleman that ever lived, and he's as gentle as a lamb and as kind as a—a fairy godfather! Why—oh! I nearly forgot to tell you—he's going to give us a ball, and it's next week—only next week, Don, and I've never even *been* to a ball in all my life, and this one's *mine!*"

She was too excited to notice the quick little look that Donald and Jack exchanged.

"Really? You'll soon be growing up, won't you?" Donald said; and, as he would have expressed it, she promptly rose to the bait.

"Molly! Do you hear that? Is that the way your brother talks to you? As if I'm not already——"

But Jack bent towards her; the observant Molly had already noticed that his eyes were never away from Sybil. "It's not the way I'd talk to *you*, anyway, Miss Sybil," he said.

But Donald would not, apparently, permit any sentimentality.

"Well said, Jackie!" he cried. "He learnt that in college, Syb! We have a special course in it!"

But Jack remained calm. "And we also learnt to ask for the first dance, the third,

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

fifth, seventh and ninth—and supper! Please, ma'am, won't you honor me with just those few, at your ball?" he asked, falling upon his knees before her, quite as if the top step of the piazza were made for the purpose.

Sybil flushed, and laughed. "Oh, I—I don't think I *can*——"

"Of course she can't!" Molly cried. "Don't be so grasping, Jack! Sybil will be hostess, and she can't let any one man monopolize her!"

"And, of course, she belongs to me for supper, anyway!" Donald remarked.

"That's very likely!" Jack protested. "Sisters are quite apt to give the best things to their brothers, aren't they? Not a bit of it, old man! Supper's mine, anyway, isn't it, Miss Sybil?"

Jack was a handsome fellow, of the typical Southern build, tall, slender, and lithe, with dark eyes and hair, and a manner as beguiling as an Irishman's. No one had ever looked at Sybil in just that way before, nor treated her with just that shade of deference; somehow, it made her feel a trifle less assured than usual.

A SURPRISE

"Well—supper, perhaps! Truly, I can't promise more!" she said, dimpling at him.

"I shall get more, though!" Jack vowed.

"Has the Colonel planned everything, Sybil?" Molly asked; and Sybil laughed.

"Well, I think he must have! He has written dozens of letters to Baltimore, and Shem and Jinny are already polishing silver that has been locked up for years—so Jinny confided to me. And Torm's 'little niggers,' as Uncle calls them, have gone over all the downstairs floors with wax so many times that Cousin Sophia has to hold on to things when she goes around corners!"

"By Jove! I hope there'll be a moon!" cried Jack Rutherford; and Donald looked at him very disdainfully.

Sybil saw the look, and hastened to speak again. "Oh, Donnie, wouldn't the twins adore the ball? Oh, I do wish they could be here!"

"Humph!" Donald grunted. "Those babies! What's the Colonel giving, anyway, a party with a cake and candles? Or a Punch and Judy show? That'd be more in the line of the twins!"

"I wish they could hear you say so!" cried

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

Sybil. And so the merry chatter went on, until the hour came when she must return to Montebello. Donald and Jack rode back with her, and when the boys were introduced to the Colonel, Sybil was tempted to believe she had been mistaken when she had declared him tamed.

The old gentleman grunted, and scowled his fiercest, while Miss Sophia trembled excitedly, and Sybil wondered what had been going on in her absence. After her escorts had gone, pursuing her usual custom of attacking the Colonel boldly from the front, she said:

"Uncle, I hope you will invite Donald to stay here with—with *us*"—here she looked up at him with a little smile—"with *us*, Uncle, before he goes home!"

Miss Sophia smiled behind the Colonel's back, but the old gentleman replied:

"Don't like boys! Haven't any use for 'em!"

Sybil thought it best to ignore this. "When will be the best time to invite him for, do you think?"

"Haven't any room for him!" the Colonel

A SURPRISE

declared; and, turning on his heel, disappeared within the library.

Sybil flushed hotly. "Oh, very well!" she said, for once leaving Miss Sophia to wring her hands and tremble uncomforted, and mounting the stairs towards her own room with all the dignity she could assume. She was quite sure that she was fully determined to go back with Donald, to remain no longer with this disagreeable old person who hated boys. She would give him plenty of leisure to hate whom he would—so she told herself—with her hand on her bedroom door.

But she was not to open her door that night. It seemed to burst open of itself as she touched it; and in a moment she found herself hugged and squeezed by four vigorous arms, kissed and swung about and hugged and kissed again, while a veritable fire-works display of adjectives and exclamations went off around her.

It was the twins!

When at last they were silent, because breathless, Sybil was quite helpless from the double surprise and the embraces and laughter. She sank to the side of the bed; with

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

Bobs on the floor in front of her, and Bunny's plump arms about her neck, she cried:

"What are—what *are* you doing here, you ridiculous children?"

The twins were too happy to notice the reference to their ages. "*He* sent for us," said Bunny between gasps.

"And we came down with Don and Jack," Bobs put in.

"Jack's been home with Donald, and I don't care very much for him, because he doesn't think I look any older with my hair up than I did with——"

"But he did say he thought my nose would be very good when I grew——"

"And he says the Chinese admire plump people——"

"And he sent the carriage for us just the way he did for you——"

"And he wouldn't let us sit up and wait for you——"

"He said when *he* was young he had to go to bed at seven o'clock——"

"And he called us 'little girls,' but he's an old dear, because he sent for us——"

"And we nearly *died* of longing to get here!"

A SURPRISE

"Oh, and wasn't the boat——"

There might have been a dozen twins, from the way they swarmed over her as their excitement rose again.

"Wait! Oh, wait!" Sybil cried, as she tried to push them away, almost too weak from laughter to talk at all. "Oh, *wait!* Oh, you—lit—tle—geese!"

It was hours before they could go to sleep; but when at last there were no more sounds from their room, and the rest of the house was still, Sybil crept out to the hall and peeped over the banister. A broad band of light fell across the floor from the library door; the sweet breath of the honeysuckle that grew over the front piazza swept in through the open front door; there was no least sound from anywhere in the house, but the little owl was calling from the big oak at the edge of the lawn. Gently, quietly, on tip-toe, she crept down the stairs; quietly she drew toward the beam of light, and peeped around the corner of the door. But quiet though she had been, the Colonel had heard her. He was sitting beside the table, the lamp-light on his white hair, and he looked up over the paper he had been reading.

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

"I—I'm sorry—I—was cross with you!" said Sybil.

The Colonel tried his best to frown. "Humph!" he said.

"And—I—I'm sorry—you—were cross with me!" she added. And before he could reply she had scampered up the stairs to bed!

XIV

THE BALL

WHEN the twins came into the dining-room on the morning after their arrival, they wore such smiling faces that unconsciously everyone else smiled with them. The Colonel did even more; for when he saw them he laughed aloud, and, rising, made them a profound bow.

"Ha! Good morning, young ladies!" he said, in the manner he might have used towards the first lady in the land. "It is a great pleasure to see you here this morning! I hope you both rested well?"

How Bunny and Bobs did beam! They adored being called young ladies, and if anything else were needed to complete their satisfaction, it was the Colonel's formal courtesy.

"Good morning, sir," said Bunny; and Bobs added, "We slept very well indeed, thank you!"

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

Seeing how greatly he had already pleased them, the Colonel did more; he stepped to the side of the table and held out a chair for Roberta, nodding to the beaming Shem to do the same for Abundance. The twins sank to their places with sighs of contentment. Then they looked about the beautiful table, with its shining silver and the big blue bowl of yellow roses in the center, then at Miss Sophia, behind her entrenchments as usual, and lastly at Sybil, fairly glowing all the while. Sybil and the Colonel exchanged glances of amusement, and Sybil said, as nearly in the manner of the happy pair as she could reproduce it:

"Oh, isn't it *exciting!*"

But the remark was so precisely what the twins were at that very moment thinking that it was no joke to them. Bobs sighed, and said:

"Oh, *isn't* it!"

And Bunny clasped her hands and spoke to the Colonel. "It's just too wonderful for words!"

The Colonel's eyes were twinkling, but he tried not to laugh. "I am greatly relieved that you did sleep well, young ladies," he said,

THE BALL

speaking in such a manner as to imply that he meant far more than he said. The twins looked questioningly at each other and at him.

"I—er—I was somewhat afraid that—er——" the Colonel went on hesitatingly. Miss Sophia began to look alarmed; but Sybil, holding her cup and pretending to ask for more coffee, whispered something to the little lady that calmed her, although her smile remained somewhat anxious. Then Sybil, not trusting herself to look at the Colonel, said:

"Perhaps, Uncle, it might be just as well not to say anything about—the—er—you know! No use alarming people—you know?"

There were long-drawn breaths of ecstasy from the twins. "Oh! Not—not a *ghost*?" cried Bunny, looking excitedly from Sybil to the Colonel.

"Oh, is it? Is there really and truly a ghost? Oh, we *do* so want to see a ghost!" Bobs exclaimed.

Then the Colonel and Sybil laughed merrily. "No, you geese!" cried Sybil. "We were just teasing you. There isn't a ghost about the place, as far as anyone knows. Perhaps you might persuade one to come pay us a visit, though!"

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

"Yes, whistle for it, as you do for a breeze," said the Colonel, chuckling.

But Miss Sophia looked anxious. "Ghosts? O dear me! I hope not, indeed!"

"Well, anyway," said Bunny, "there must be a mystery. There couldn't be an old house like this without a mystery!"

The Colonel's brows drew down somewhat at that, and Sybil hastened to avert a possible storm.

"You *are* such infants!" she said to the twins, in her most elder-sisterly manner, which never failed to win a protest from them, as she very well knew.

"Indeed, Sybil," said Bobs, very earnestly, "I do think you might let us be *one* year older every year! You still treat us as you did when we were *twelve*!"

"Hear, hear!" said the Colonel. "I quite agree with these young ladies, my dear! When people are old enough to go to balls, it seems to me they are very nearly grown-up, at any rate!"

"Nonsense!" Sybil said. "Uncle, these children cannot possibly come to the dance! Why, they're still in short dresses! What would Mother-dear say?"

THE BALL

Immediately the two looked anxious, but the Colonel smiled at them reassuringly. "That was all arranged before the ladies left home," he said. "I have full permission here," he tapped the region of his breast pocket—"and I think there are some ribbons and folderols in a box in the bottom of the big trunk that arrived last night."

"Oh! The box Mother-dear told us not to peep into!" the twins cried.

Then, their feelings being altogether too much for them, they jumped up from the table with one accord, and rushed upon the Colonel with embraces such as he had never before experienced in all his seventy-odd years of life. Whether he liked them or not might have been told by the way he and the twins spent the hours before the long-expected Saturday evening, always in a little company of three, sometimes doing things with a step-ladder and branches of cedar, sometimes with strings of Japanese lanterns, sometimes in the kitchen, greatly to Aunt Sair' Ann's disgust and confusion, sometimes unpacking the big boxes that came down from Baltimore, but always together, always merry, and, most

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

wonderful to relate as far as the Colonel was concerned, always in a good humor!

Sybil was delighted to see the old man so happy. "He is only a dear big old baby, himself," she whispered to Donald, when, the morning of the ball, they were all busily at work on the preparations. "Look at him now—he's just about the age of those twins!"

The Colonel had a paper cap on his head—Bobs had wished to investigate one of the cotillion favors—and was standing on a kitchen chair putting candles into the lanterns that swayed in the breeze above the front steps.

"He's not such a bad sort, after all," said Donald. "But I hope you aren't getting so fond of him, Syb, that you'll want to stay down here."

Sybil looked at him indignantly. "Why, Donald Crawford! How *can* you be jealous of that dear old man?" she said, as usual attacking from the front.

Donald ignored her remark. "And if you'll allow me to say so," he went on, "I think you'd better not get too fond of anybody else down here, either!"

Sybil stared at him in amazement for a

THE BALL

moment; then she began to understand something of his meaning, and her face flushed.

"Would you mind explaining just what you mean?" she asked, quietly.

"Oh, I guess you know well enough," said Donald. "How many dances have you promised him, anyway?"

Sybil did know what he meant, and not without reason. On the excuse of helping with the preparations for the ball, the Ruthers and Donald had been at Montebello every day and all day; and Jack was not one of those young men who are content to let things drift along. In whatever craft he was interested he must be at the helm. So he had won more tête-à-têtes with Sybil, but not more than Donald had noticed. Now, as Donald spoke, Sybil realized how well she had come to know Jack during even these few days, and flushed; but she would have turned the point of his unfortunate remark, or laughed it away, if Jack himself had not come around the corner of the hall just in time to hear a part of it. But come he did, and it was evident that he had heard; for he stood still, looking from Donald's angry face to Sybil's blushing one.

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

Then he also flushed slightly, but at the same time made a brave effort to speak lightly.

"Yes, how many dances *have* you promised him, Sybil? Because if you promise dances to anyone but Don and me, there'll be trouble—won't there, Don?"

Donald glowered, and said nothing. Sybil determined his punishment on the instant.

"Oh, we don't want any trouble," she said, "so just to pacify you, Jack, you may have the supper dance—if you still want it!"

Now it was Donald's turn to flush! He had claimed Sybil for supper since the first mention of the ball. Jack looked from one to the other.

"Want it! Of course I do! But—I say!"

Sybil was smiling at Donald, calmly, serenely, and looking at him out of the corners of her eyes. She had scored! And what was more, she had never looked more bewitching, and both young men were as well aware of it as she was herself!

"Oh, all right!" said Donald, and swinging himself around, stalked away.

Jack looked after him, then gave vent to a prolonged whistle. "By Jove!" he ex-

THE BALL

claimed. "I say! I hope you'll never be as cruel as that to *me*!"

"Cruel? In giving you the supper dance? Oh, if you feel that way——"

"You know how I feel about it, Sybil!" said Jack, coming closer until Sybil hastily stepped back. "You know I've wanted that dance all along! That's why I know how *Don* feels at having it taken away from him. I want it as badly as I want anything—almost; but I don't think you ought to take it away from old Don."

"Oh, pray don't take it if you don't want to," said Sybil, wilfully misunderstanding. But unlike poor Donald, Jack remained cool. He even bent a little toward her. "If I don't want to!" Sybil! Look up here—look at me! Shall I tell you what I *do* want?"

But that was too much for Sybil's composure. Donald and Dick never spoke to her, never looked at her, like that!

"No! Oh, no!" she cried, and slipping past Jack ran away as fast as she could.

How she wished that the spirit of mischief had not stirred her to attack poor old Donald! There had been something in Jack's face that frightened her, and she wanted to hide—to

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

hide from herself, if possible, but certainly to hide from all inquisitive eyes as long as her blushes lasted and her heart was beating in that disagreeable way—or that way that was almost disagreeable! She ran through the hall—the twins called after her to come and help advise the Colonel in his decorations. She went into the drawing-room—Miss Sophia was there bubbling with excited questions about the floor. She made an excuse to go up to her room, and bumped into Donald on the stairs—Donald, still looking thunderous and gloomy. At last she reached her own door and shut it behind her—to find Jinny on her knees before Molly, sewing up a torn ruffle!

“O dear!” she cried, the words coming out before she was aware of them.

Molly looked up, saw the blushing face, remembered the voices that had risen, indistinctly, from the piazza beneath the window, raised her eyebrows, and smiled.

“Thank you, Jinny,” she said, bending over and taking the needle from Jinny’s hand. “Miss Sybil will finish this for me, I know. Go down to your work now.”

Then, when Jinny was gone, she shook her

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head at Sybil. "Something's been happening!" she said.

Sybil crossed the room to a window, and stood there, looking out, her hands on her burning cheeks. Molly calmly sewed on until the ruffle was mended, broke the thread, stuck the needle in a cushion, and then went to Sybil's side, putting her arms around her friend.

"Confess!" she said. "Something's been happening!"

But Sybil had recovered a part, at least, of her self-possession. "Yes, I've been fighting with Donald," she said "and it always upsets me so to quarrel with him!"

Molly smiled, all unseen. "Ah! A dreadful thing, to quarrel with one's brother! But it wasn't *your* brother's voice I heard beneath this window, my child!"

At that Sybil swung around. "Oh! Did you *hear?*" she cried.

"Hear you quarrelling with Donald? Not a word!"

"No, you wretch! Did you hear—Oh, Molly! You *didn't*—did you?"

Molly laughed. "Not a word! On my honor I did not! But I heard Jack's voice—

THE COLONEL'S EXPERIMENT

and I've known my brother quite a while, dear!"

"Oh, well," said Sybil, "he wasn't saying anything you ought not to have heard, you know!"

"I'm quite sure of that," said Molly. "But I think I could give a very good guess——"

"Don't!" cried Sybil.

But Molly's face was serious now, and she kissed Sybil on the cheek. "I've been watching Jack ever since he came home," she said, "and I knew this was coming."

Sybil blushed furiously. "Molly! Oh, Molly! Please—*please!* Don't talk like that! Nothing *has* happened! Jack hasn't said a word that—that means——"

"Oh, well, he will!" said Molly, calmly.

"I never heard of such nonsense!" Sybil protested. "I can't pretend not to know what you mean—you make it too plain. But it's nonsense—how could it be anything else, with such a boy?"

"Jack is twenty-one," Molly said. "Papa was married when he was twenty-one, and Grandfather was only twenty! So it isn't altogether nonsense, not on Jack's part, anyway, you see!"

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"Oh, but it is!" Sybil cried, really distressed now. "Besides, Donald——" She stopped, not finding the words for what she wished to say.

"Donald won't count, Sybil, if Jack is the right one for you," said Molly. "Do you suppose Jack will count with me, when my right one comes along?"

Sybil drew away, and again stood looking out of the window. How could she explain? Yet she was beginning to feel that she must.

"Molly," she said, "I want to tell you something. It is a secret—and not altogether my secret. So will you promise not to tell a single soul?"

"Why—ought you tell me a secret that isn't yours?" Molly asked.

"I know I ought to tell you this. Promise?"

"Of course I promise. But——"

"No buts! Listen! I am not really Donald's sister, nor the twins' sister, nor—anybody's. I—I am an Adopted, Molly!"

"A what?" Molly asked, amazed and incredulous and amused.

"An Adopted. An adopted child, you know. Doctor Crawford and Mother-dear are not my really-truly mother and father, although

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they are all I've ever known, and I love them just precisely the same. My father and mother died when I was a tiny baby, and they gave me to Dad and Mother-dear. Donald knows, and Dick, but the others don't even suspect."

Molly's amazement was quite speechless at first, but she was thinking hard. "And—they named you—Sybilla?" she asked.

"Yes. Probably because it was a family name."

Molly's expression was strange indeed. She was looking at Sybil as if she had never seen her clearly before, and there were little red spots of excitement on her cheeks. "Probably!" she said, with a queer little smile. Then she asked, "Does the Colonel know this?"

"No! And you promised not to tell a soul!" Sybil reminded her.

"I know! But oh, Sybil, *Jack* must know! You will let me tell poor old Jack, won't you? Why, Donald knows that you——"

"Of course I won't! Why should I?" Sybil cried.

"Oh, it's not fair!" Molly began; but Sybil had endured enough, and, with a little laugh,

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she ran away to join the workers in the room below.

Even the most elaborate of preparations must come to an end at last, however. By supper-time on that evening of the long-expected Saturday, the old house of Montebello was dressed forth in such state as it had not seen in two generations. Every mantelpiece was banked high with flowers, every fire-place filled with them. Every window and door stood wide open, a lantern swaying in each. There were candles on the mantels and tables, in branching candelabras and girandoles, all awaiting the coming of darkness to shine out like so many captive fireflies. The great square hall, with its marble floor, was to be the supper-room; the sideboard from the dining-room had been moved out there, and was groaning with its burden of dainties. Little tables were set in the corners, and crowded back against the walls, later to be brought forward, when supper-time should arrive; others were on the lawn.

"Standing there like ladies of the chorus, in their white dresses, waiting for their turn to dance to the front of the stage," said Jack Rutherford, as the party from Montford

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looked back through the doorway for a final survey before they went home to dress.

The furniture in the four big rooms downstairs had been moved back, and the bare floors gleamed with wax, shining tributes to the industry of Torm's youngsters. On the veranda were groups of easy-chairs, and similar groups waited invitingly under the trees on the lawn; while on the front steps—time-honored lounging place of the young people of the South—were rugs and cushions; and here, there, and everywhere the Colonel had left big palm-leaf fans.

"Cert'n'y does look like ol' times befo' de War," said Aunt Sair' Ann, standing in the hall with arms akimbo, when "the fambly" had gone upstairs, and she had come up from the kitchen to see "the rooms." "Ain't seen nothin' like dis yer sence—sence——"

Shem came close to his wife, and whispered something in her ear. Aunt Sair' Ann jumped.

"G'way f'om here," she cried, "wid yo' sinivations. Ain't no sech thing as comin' back, not in de flesh, anyways! You g'way f'om here, you black Shem! Missy don' look no mo' like ol' Miss—den—den——"

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But Shem beckoned his better half across the hall to the Colonel's study, now looking so unlike its usual self in its unaccustomed festive dress. The two crossed the room to the door that was always kept closed, the "door of memory." Shem drew a key from his pocket, put it in the lock, turned it, and opened the door a little way.

"You poke yo' haid in dar!" he commanded.

Sair' Ann did as he bade her, and whatever she saw must certainly have alarmed her. She drew back with a cry that was half a moan, threw her apron over her head, and sank to her knees.

"Oh, my soul! Oh, my soul!" she moaned. "De daid done come to life! De jedgmint day's at hand fo' sure!"

Shem locked the door again, and put the key back in his pocket.

"No 'tain't," he said. "'Tain't nothin' more'n de day o' de ball! But I knows fo' sure dey's some'n queer in de air, 'cause 'tain't like de Cunnel to go roun' like a lamb on a leadin' string, wid dem twinses and Missy a leadin' of him. I tell you what 'tis, Sair' Ann, it's Missy——"

Aunt Sair' Ann arose, and faced her small

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husband majestically. "You hush!" she said, solemnly. "You hush! 'Tain't for you an' me, ner fer de likes ob you an' me, to go roun' inquiren' into de mysttreeous! You come along down to de kitchen an' put on dat white coat I done ironed for you, an' help me whop up dem aigs for de custard. Dem twins sure kin eat a powerful lot fo' supper!"

So Shem went off to get into his white coat, while upstairs Miss Sophia was dressing in her brand-new lavender silk which the dressmaker in St. Anne's had ordered from Baltimore especially for the great occasion, and Sybil was putting on the white dress that Mother-dear had sent in the mysterious box in the bottom of the twins' trunk, and that exuberant pair were admiring their new sashes, and Abundance was vainly pleading with Sybil to be allowed to "do up" her hair. The Colonel was an inordinately proud old gentleman when "the ladies" came down stairs.

He stood in the hall, looking up at them, radiant in his evening suit which had not been worn for many years, and was just a trifle tight about the waist, but none the less becoming and imposing. The twins were the

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first to descend, and the old gentleman raised his hands in admiration when they stood before him.

"Dear, dear!" he said. "Such magnificence!"

The twins threw themselves upon him, greatly to the alarm of Sybil, who was coming down at the moment.

"Oh, don't! Children, don't! Remember his collar!" she cried. When the twins had run up to show themselves to Miss Sophia, and they were alone together in the hall, she said:

"Uncle, I am tempted to wonder which is the better man, you or my Dad!"

It was so unexpected a remark, and meant so much, that for a moment the Colonel could only look at her in silence. Then, to her dismay, his eyes slowly filled with tears—and tears always seem so painful, so pitiful, in the eyes of the old! Sybil put her arms about one of his, and laid her cheek against his shoulder, so that she need not see; then, resting a little kiss on the black broadcloth, she drew away.

"Oh, I nearly forgot! I have a posy for you!" she cried. "I have kept it in Shem's

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ice-box all day!" She ran away, but was back in a minute or two with a little boutonnière she had made—a white rose, with a sprig of maiden-hair, and a cluster of unopened buds. She pinned it in place on her uncle's coat, while he watched her; and when he had thanked her, he added:

"And I have something for you, my dear!"

Then, from a mysterious pocket in the tails of his coat he brought out a box of worn red morocco. She opened it, divining that it must hold something he greatly treasured, and looked down at a necklace of little pearls.

The Colonel laid his hand on her head. "I want you to wear those at your first ball, my child! They belonged to—another—Sybilla!"

And, without waiting for thanks, he walked away, with bent head, toward his library.

But its unaccustomed aspect was not inviting, and he was back again in time to hear the twins declare, as they inspected Sybil's pearls, "Oh, it's just like Christmas!"

For once the young people were too excited to do justice to Aunt Sair' Ann's supper; and, as the Colonel's invitation had been to come early, the guests began to arrive before the moon was up. Sybil stood between Miss So-

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phia and the Colonel, just inside the big front door, to welcome them. They were of all ages; and if the younger ones looked at her for one reason, the older ones must have found a reason of their own.

"My niece, Sybilla!" was the Colonel's invariable introduction; but many a white-haired man and woman looked at her more than once, that night, and repeated, in tones of varying wonder:

"Sybilla!"

Many there were, too, who watched her open the dance with the Colonel, a charming pair, treading the almost forgotten figures of the lancers, which Japhet called out in a mellow negro voice that fairly sang with enjoyment. For Japhet appeared that night in a new rôle, and fiddled away as merrily as Torm, or Major Rutherford's Moses, or Miss Sophie Hartwell's Big Ben. Old Japhet was only one of many who watched her white figure wherever it danced; nor was he the only one who shook his head and sighed, at the memory of something or someone she recalled.

And indeed, if Sybil had been sweet and charming before, she was something more to-night. Feeling herself the hostess of this

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goodly company, knowing herself as the one whom the Colonel delighted to honor before them all, it was no more than seemly that she should hold herself with a little more dignity, lift her head with something of new stateliness, bestow her smiles and dances with a royal impartiality, have a thought for everyone's comfort, take good care that all of the young people danced and the older ones had comfortable places. Even for the brown faces peeping in through the back windows she had a special smile and nod, and, at Jinny's whispered request, she even slipped off to the kitchen to "show herself!"

Everyone declared that if Montebello had indeed been closed for years, it more than made up for its long obscurity by the brilliancy of that night. The Colonel had spared nothing of forethought or expense, every servant did his or her part, the weather was perfect, the moon almost full! The floors were like glass, the supper was delicious, and the fiddles unwearied! The twins danced every dance, for their beaming faces were irresistible magnets for partners; and if Sybil, as was only natural, had more swains than she could manage, she relented toward Donald

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so far as to divide her supper dance between him and Jack Rutherford. Indeed, it was not until everyone else was taken care of that she let the pair of them find her a place on the lawn, and bring her a share of ices and other good things.

The Colonel was attentiveness itself to his guests, but somehow he managed to know where Sybil was every minute; and at supper-time Major Rutherford found him standing in a far corner by a window, looking out on the lawn where she was the center of a pretty group. As Major Rutherford stood watching him, the old gentleman lifted the lapel of his coat on which Sybil's white rose rested, and looked down at it.

The Major came up and laid a hand on his old friend's shoulder. "I believe that's a sentimental token, William!" he said, teasingly.

The Colonel wheeled about with a smile. "Yes, Tom, that's just what it is," he said. "The little girl presented it to me! And—Tom—d'ye know what rose it is? It was cut from the bush Sybilla planted—and *that* grew from a sprig of her wedding bouquet!"

He turned to look again at the young peo-

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ple on the lawn. Neither could speak. Old memories arose, crowding about them like wraiths of the past. So they stood silently, until the groups on the lawn began to break up into other groups; then Major Rutherford said:

“God moves in a mysterious way, William.”

“Yes,” said the Colonel. “And sometimes we poor mortals do all we can to block His way, Tom.”

XV

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BRIGHT and early on the morning after the ball, long before the sandman had departed from the twins, and while the Colonel and Miss Sophia were still asleep, Sybil arose, dressed herself in her riding-habit, and crept on tip-toe down to the kitchen. Aunt Sair' Ann seemed to be expecting her, early though it was.

"Well, now, jest look yonder!" she cried, with a beaming smile and upraised hands of admiration. "Fraish as a rose, same's ef we-all didn't *have* no ball last night! It do beat all how de young folks can prance an' dance an' keep on a-goin'!"

"Then you must be young yourself, Auntie," Sybil laughed, "for you're up and going this morning, too!"

"Sho! Ol' nigger like me don't need more'n

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a wink er two to keep a'goin'!" said Sair' Ann, but looking delighted at the compliment.

"Have you got *that* ready for me?" Sybil asked.

Sair' Ann's turbaned head shook, and her voice was troubled. "Yes, lamb, I'se got it ready. But I ain't so sure about all dis yer takin's an' goin' visitin's withouten de Cunnel's knowin' of it!"

"He does know," said Sybil. "At least, he knows I go there. Why, what's the matter?" For the old negress had grasped the table for support, and her face had turned a peculiar, ashen gray.

"De Cunnel knows? He knows you go to see——" she gasped.

"Yes, he does! I told him," Sybil replied. And although some inner voice warned her not to question further, she pondered it all the way to the little brown house in the woods. For that was the destination of her early morning ride. She carried a basket of good things, a share of everything that had been served at supper the night before, except of the ices.

"It was *my* ball, in *my* honor, you see," she exclaimed to the Hermit, as he helped her

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remount after her short call, "and I thought of you and wished you were there, Mr. John. That's why I brought you some of my goodies—my own goodies, you know!"

The old man looked up at her, and smiled, wistfully. "I am glad you remembered me, Sybilla," he said, "and I shall eat every crumb in the basket! It's a bounty no one could refuse!"

But Sybil was serious, and did not return his smile. "No, it's not that way at all," she said. "Please understand what I mean, Mr. John! I should have been honored, if you had been one of my guests! You will honor me just the same by being my guest here!"

The Hermit's face showed that he understood. "I thank you, little girl," he said, and stood watching her until Damascus bore her out of sight.

But for a while her visits to the lonely old man were of necessity few and far between. Glorious days, indeed, followed the wonderful ball. For the first time in years the old white house rang to the echo with the laughter and chatter of young people. The Colonel was never so happy, never so agreeable; he had all but forgotten how to roar! He was

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polite to everyone, even to the boys, as he persisted in calling Donald and Jack and the other young men who made the most of every opportunity to try the softness of the Montebello front steps. But of all the good times, the best were those which the two households of Montebello and Montford enjoyed together, without other guests.

"Yonder's de fo'th choc'late cake I'se baked sence Sat'day," Aunt Sair' Ann announced to Shem, as she wielded her broad-bladed knife for the crowning flourishes to the rich brown icing. "And I ain't got but four o' de nineteen chickens left, what Torm cooped up last week. An' all ma' strawbe'y jam, what I put up for de winter, it's done gone, all 'ceptin' two dozen glasses! An' I wisht' everything in the house was et up, if by so bein' dese chillen could be kept here for de res' o' my mortual life!"

Shem paused in the doorway. "Ye-ah! Now you talkin'! I ain't hear de Cunnel laugh so much, not sence he was a little boy, when he an' Marse John——"

He had to dodge a well-aimed muffin thrown by Aunt Sair' Ann. "Get outen here!" she cried. "You get outen ma kitchen,

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talkin' 'bout what ain't yo' business!
You——"

Shem vanished, to finish buttering the bread for the long-discussed picnic on the water.

For Molly's project was about to become a reality; and the surprise and disgust of the twins had been great, when, the evening before, the menu for the lunch-basket had been discussed.

"I am sure Cousin Sophia will let us have anything we want," Sybil said, while Bobs grinned at Donald in anticipation of the good things coming.

"In my young days," said the Colonel, as well as he could, while Roberta balanced on one arm of his chair and Bunny on the other, "in my young days we used to take bread and butter, and some pepper and salt, and fare very well indeed!"

Molly laughed. "That's just what we're going to do now, sir," she told him. "Do change your mind and come with us!"

But the old gentleman shook his head. "No, no! I seem to have lost my taste for gallivanting around on the Bay, and a crab on my table's a good deal better than one

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from a camp-fire, nowadays. I reckon I'll leave you young people to Uncle Frank."

Abundance could not keep quiet another minute. "Oh, but that's not all we're going to have to eat, is it? Why, on the Fourth of July picnics at home we have——"

"Bunny!" Sybil protested.

But Roberta could always be counted upon to back up her twin. "Chocolate cake and pie and loads and loads of sandwiches and water-melon and ginger-pop——"

At that point Donald, who was sitting on the steps, administered a silencing pinch.

"I suppose you'll run up to Pine Knoll," the Colonel said, reminiscently. "That used to be the place for the camp-fire!"

"Yes, sir; and we'll get the oysters from Cousin Todd Calvert's bed; he never minds."

"Oysters! Why, this is July, and there isn't any R in it! How can you eat oysters when there isn't any R?" cried Bobs.

The three natives of Maryland laughed, and the Colonel, to whom the twins were a constant delight, said:

"Uncle Frank will show you how to eat oysters without an R, young lady!" and Bobs

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hugged him; she did so adore being called "young lady!"

When the baskets were ready, and the twins had bothered Aunt Sair' Ann and Jinny and Shem almost out of their wits, and danced around the Colonel with questions and exclamations until the old gentleman had to hold his hands over his ears, and they were off, at last, in the farm wagon driven by Torm, Miss Sophia sighed, and said:

"Dear me, Brother! I had quite forgotten that young people were—were quite like that!"

But the Colonel, broadly smiling, was too contented with the vigorous present to look back upon the past.

"I hope none of 'em will fall overboard," he remarked.

"Oh!" cried Miss Sophia, and began to wring her hands. "Oh, Brother! Do you really suppose any of them *will*?"

The old gentleman faced about, apparently on the verge of an explosion; but, instead, he patted her kindly on the shoulder.

"There, there, Sophia!" he said, smiling. "Do try to behave like a sensible woman!"

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If I really anticipated anything of the sort, I'd have gone with 'em myself!"

Perhaps the old gentleman rather wished he had gone, for he wandered about the house, down to the stables, aimlessly, restlessly, all day long, until it was time to drive over to Fordham to bring them back.

And he might well have wished it, for such a good time they had! From the moment they came in sight of the little private wharf at the foot of the orchard cliff, they were all excitement. Donald came forward to help Sybil, and was rather dignified for an hour afterward because Jack Rutherford got there first; except for that, everything went splendidly.

The little *Blue Wing* was a miniature oysterman's canoe, roomy and swift, with a tiny makeshift of a cabin, and, at the moment, without masts.

"Who's going to row?" Bobs demanded as she jumped aboard. "Let me help!"

The old negro who was bending over a heap of canvas looked up with a grin. "Jest you wait twell we gits de mast sot up, Miss, an' you won't have to specurate on who's to

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do de rowin'! Dis yer's de fastest canoe on de Bay!"

"That's right, Uncle Frank! You stand up for the *Blue Wing*!" Jack called out, laughingly, as he helped to ship the mast. The management of the little craft was too novel to Donald for him to be able to do much of anything; so he sat in the stern, his hand on the tiller, obeying Uncle Frank's directions, with Sybil and Molly changing sides as the boat tacked.

"Ef you young ladies will jest perch up dar on de gun'le," Uncle Frank requested, "when she yearns over to'rds de water, for ballast like, I'll be much obleeged to ye! An' Marse Jack, honey, you shove dat centerbo'd 'way down, so she won't slide off, an' we'll see some sailin'!"

So to the great delight of the twins the four girls, and frequently Jack, had to line up on the gunwale of the boat, while the *Blue Wing* skimmed over the water, past the mouth of Cherrypit Creek, and on down the Bay.

Beside the low shores they slipped along, where sometimes peach-orchards ran down to

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the water, sometimes fields of green corn, and more often a growth of pine.

"There's the Hermit's house, Don," said Sybil, pointing to it, as they passed the place where the little brown cottage seemed to be hiding among the pines. Then she waved, for her keen eyes made out a figure on the little bench among the bushes.

The twins cried in unison. "Hermit? Hermit? Where's the Hermit? Oh, Syb! Take us to see the Hermit!"

"Indeed I shall not," Sybil declared.

"Oh! A Hermit! Isn't there a mystery, too?" cried Bobs.

They both wiggled about on the edge of the boat until Uncle Frank called out, in his slow drawl:

"'Deed, Miss Bunny, 'deed, Miss Bobby, ef you-all don't stop a-wigglin' an' a-turnin' an' a-twistin' up dar, you sholy will be likely to fall outen dis yer boat into de water an' git drowned!"

The accident might have happened a dozen times while he was drawling his warning! Molly and Sybil laughed, and Jack crossed over to sit between the twins, in case of trouble.

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The talk went on about the Hermit, to the delight of the frisky pair, and then about the houses they passed.

Presently Jack Rutherford said, "There's Cousin Todd's barn, Uncle Frank! Time to get out the tongs?"

"No, sir," said Uncle Frank, "'tain't time to get out de tongs twell somebody's hongry!"

At that, as Frank's grin plainly showed he was expecting, the twins nearly fell overboard again.

"Oh, hi-yi! Reckon dey is somebody hongry!" the old man said, disappearing within the little cabin. When he emerged he dragged out with him a curious iron implement and some coils of rope and clanking chain.

"Let me steer, Donald, so you can share the fun," said Molly; and the boys helped Uncle Frank throw the tongs over the stern.

"Mercy! That's funny fishing!" Bobs remarked.

Just then the "fish" came aboard—the great iron fingers of the tongs clasped about a mass of dripping oyster-shells.

"There, you two," said Jack, as the tongs went overboard again, "that the way we get oysters without an R!"

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Seven and eight times the tongs were dropped, until at last Uncle Frank remarked:

"I reckon we-all better leave Marse Todd some oysters fo' next winter! Put her about, Miss Molly, please, Miss!"

To the further surprise of the four from the north, Molly headed the *Blue Wing* into a sheltered miniature of a bay, where the woods came down to the shore, and the level of the land was only a few feet above the water. When she had sailed so close that the bow almost touched the overhanging grass, Jack called out:

"Well done, Molly! Ease up the sheet, Uncle Frank!" and sprang ashore with a painter which he proceeded to make fast to the trunk of a tree.

"Goodness! Is this where we get off? What station is this?" cried Bobs the irrepressible.

"Oh, I never can jump across that water!" exclaimed Abundance, when she saw Jack's agile leap ashore.

The others laughed. "You won't have to," Molly assured her.

She was busy opening the baskets; and from one, the wide-eyed twins watching every

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movement, she took out a ham-bone and the end of a roast. When she had further produced a long-handled net, and tied the bones to stout pieces of string, she tossed them overboard and handed the ends to the twins.

"Here! Now you two can fish, while Sybil and I get the rest of the luncheon ready!"

But the twins looked indignant. "Why don't you give us bent pins?" asked Bunny, eyeing the dangling bones; and Bobs remarked:

"She wants us to fish for whales, Bun!

"Little Bobby went a-fishing,
Went a-fishing for a whale,
And all the water she could get
Was in—

"was in the Chesapeake Bay."

But Sybil had been long enough near the Chesapeake to understand. "It's crabs, you geese!" she said, as well as she could for laughing. "Toss your bait overboard, and the crabs will take hold; then you land them with that net. See?"

In an instant the two were hanging over the edge of the boat, and in another a shriek from Abundance announced the first catch.

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Meanwhile, Donald and Jack had been gathering dried sticks ashore, and Uncle Frank had a lively fire going; then he "toted dem oysters ashore," as he expressed it, and was soon roasting them, in their shells, among the red embers. Sybil and Molly were unpacking the sandwiches, a crock of fresh butter, and the little boxes of salt and pepper; and by the time the twins had filled a large basket with lively blue crabs, Uncle Frank announced that the first course was ready.

Never had anything tasted so good! The young people sat in a row on the edge of the boat, their feet dangling over, while Frank passed along the opened oyster shells, each with its delicious contents roasted to a turn, and floating in melted butter. It is best not to say what they used as knives and forks, for the usual implements had been forgotten.

When the last oyster had disappeared, the crabs, partly roasted and partly steamed under a wet "gunny-sack," were also ready to be passed along by Uncle Frank, to be accompanied with bread-and-butter and some of Clarissy's famous pickles.

Then, as a final course to the most remarkable meal any of the Crawfords had ever

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tasted, they all went ashore, and each gathered his own blackberries for dessert, simply eating from the bushes until they had had enough!

Bunny was the last of the young people to go back to the boat. She stood on the edge of the shore, looking at the few feet of water that she must jump; then she shook her head, and said:

"It's no use! I thought I couldn't jump it before I ate those five crabs; but there's no thinking about it, now! I guess I'll have to let you maroon me on this desert isle!"

But before the others were done laughing there was a little shriek from Bunny! Old Uncle Frank, still able to do his day's work and more, had stepped into the water, taken her up as lightly as if she were a doll, and deposited her in the boat!

"I'se done hefted more pounds than you, Miss Bunny!" he said, grinning.

And as he pushed the boat off from shore and scrambled aboard, Molly cried:

"Oh, that reminds me, Uncle Frank! I promised Miss Sybil you would sing her 'Lord Lovell'!"

Uncle Frank ducked his head bashfully.

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"Aw now, Miss Molly, ain't nobody gwine listen to a ol' nigger sing!" he protested.

"Why, Uncle Frank, I've been looking forward to hearing you for months!" Sybil declared.

And Donald added, seriously, "Why, Uncle Frank, that's the principal reason I came down here—to hear you sing!"

The old man looked delighted. "Sho' now! You don' say so!"

"Fact," said Donald. "Isn't that so, Jack?"

"It certainly is," Jack agreed, with equal seriousness. "I told him up north, where we were at college, Uncle Frank, that you'd sing him 'Lord Lovell' and tell us about the hidden treasure; so he came!"

"Oh! Oh—eeee!" squealed Bobs. "I want the hidden treasure first!"

The old negro looked very much impressed, and solemnly, and without a trace of self-consciousness, began:

"Well, sir, Marse Jack, you put de *Blue Wing* on de long tack to'ds de other sho'; and Miss Bunny, please, Miss, don't set out so fur over de water, honey! Well, about de hidden treasure——"

"Was it a real treasure?" asked Bunny.

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"Hit sho' was! Ain't dat what I'm tellin' you? Hyar's de way hit come about. Me an' my brother, we belonged to Marse Jo Rutherford, a cousin o' de Major's, over to Blackwater, an' when de War come along, an' dey was talk about de soldiers a-comin', we-all buried our silver, cause de soldiers what was a-comin' was Yankees. I was de house boy, an' my brother, he was de dinin'-room boy; an' we went out with Miss Sally one dark o' de moon, an' dug a hole in de gyardin, an' buried all de silver. Yessir, we even buried Marse Jo's christenin' mug, an' de baby's spoon; 'cause we didn't want de Yankees to git 'em.

"Well, sir, de soldiers didn't come down dat away, after all, an' we needn't'a buried de silver. But all de niggers, 'ceptin' me an' my mammy an' brother, run away, an' after a while Marse Jo got killed; an' Marse Tom, his youngest brother, he got killed; an' Miss Sally took de baby an' me an' my mammy, an' come over hyar to Cherrypit. An' de baby, she growed up an' got married, an' Miss Sally went up north with her; an' my mammy died, an' my brother died——"

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"Mercy! What a lot of funerals you must have had!" put in Bobs.

"Yes, Miss!" Uncle Frank agreed, demurely. "Well, de years went along, like dey do, some lively's a circus in de spring-time, some slow's a mud-tarrapin. And one November a gre't big tall black man come along, an' says he's a diviner."

"Diviner of what?" asked Molly.

"I don't know, Miss! Jest a kind o' gin'ral diviner, I reckon. He told eve'ybody around hyar how he could divine whar treasure was buried. I didn't pay any attention to sech talk, twell one night he come to me, an' say as how he could lead me to buried treasure, an' if I'd do de diggin' he'd give me half. Well, sir, I was settin' up to Melissey Lou about dat time, an' I was jest a hankerin' for a tall silk hat an' a long-tailed coat; so half o' the buried treasure sounded rale good to dis nigger. I told him I'd sho do all de diggin' *he* wanted; an' one night we sot off to find de place.

"Dat diviner had a rale smart pair o' mewels, dat could trot as fast as anything in de country, 'ceptin' some o' de gen'lemens' drivin' horses; an' we drove an' we drove,

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twell it seemed to me we must be gettin' as fur away from de Major's as ever I'd been. We jest jounced along, bumpitty bump, up hill an' down dale, wid things a-rattlin' in de wagon behind us. It was awful dark an' quair an' lonesome, an' I says to de diviner, I say, 'What's dat a-rattlin'?' An' he make me de answer. 'Dat's jest some skulls an' some bones I got in de wagon!' Land! I jest felt de shivers runnin' up an' down my back! I says, 'I didn't see no skulls an' bones in de wagon!' An' he makes me de answer, 'Maybe you didn't!'"

"O-oo-o-o-oh!" breathed the twins, in a long breath of ecstasy.

Uncle Frank shook his head up and down. "Um-hum! An' dat ain't all! Whiles we was a-jouncin' an' a-bouncin' through a black, deep forest, some'n' switched me on de cheek, an' I squeals out, an' says, 'Ouch! W'at's dat?' An' w'at you reckon dat diviner say?"

"What?" the twins besought him.

"Well, sir, dat diviner make me de answer, 'Dat ain't nothin' to hurt you! I won't let my flyin' black cats an' my tame screech owls tech you! Um-hum!'"

"O-o-oh!" sighed the twins.

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"Well, sir, after a while we got to a place whar de ground was kinder cleared out, with only a few little bushes settin' about. De diviner, he got outen de wagon, an' me after him. He looks around, an' he say, 'Frank, now you look all around you! Does dis place remind you of anything?' So I looks all around, an' bimeby I say, 'Ef dem bushes was a little lower, an' ef dey was any little paths runnin' in an' out, maybe 'twould remin' me o' Miss Sally's gyardin what we-all left durin' de War.'

"An' Mr. Diviner, he put a spade in my hand, an' he say, 'Now you jest walk aroun' dis place what reminds you o' Miss Sally's gyardin, an' when you feels called on to dig, you dig!'

"An' he sot down on de ground, an' begun to mumble. I never did take much to mumblin', 'specially in de dark o' de moon; so I walks aroun', an' de more I walks de more it reminds me o' Miss Sally's little gyardin whar we buried de silver. Bimeby I comes to a big bush wid red berries on it, an' I says to myself, 'Ef dat was only about half as tall, it might be de ve'y bush what we buried de silver under!' An' first thing I

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know, I had de spade in de ground a-diggin'!

"I had a rale big hole dug, an' I stops to rest me a little mite, when I heard somethin' behind me a-rattlin'. 'What's dat?' I says. An' de diviner makes me de answer, 'Dat ain't nothin' to hurt you. My skulls an' bones always rattles dat away, whenever anybody's diggin' an' stops!' So to please de skulls an' de bones I reckoned I better begin to dig again. An' every time I stop to rest, dey begin to rattle some mo', so I jest kept on diggin', so's to keep 'em satisfied.

"An' after a while, my spade his some'n' in de hole, an' made a noise like two knives a-screechin against each other; an' some'n' flew past my face an' whopped me. I calls out, 'Who hittin' my face? You stop it!'

"But de diviner say, 'I wouldn't talk to 'em like dat ef I was you! My flyin' black cats an' my pet screech-owls is rale tame, but dey might git mad an' beyon' my control!' An' as de skulls and de bones was rattlin' rale lively at de time, I went on diggin', but I could jest feel de flesh a-walkin' up an' down my spine! Yessir! It wasn't a-creepin'! It was a-stompin'!

"An' den, all of a sudden, seem like some'n'

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must aroused all de tame screech-owls an' de flyin' black cats an' de skulls an' de bones, 'cause dey let out de most awful screech ever I hyar in all my life. My spade had jest done dug up some'n' or other, but, honey, old Frank didn't wait to see what it was! I jest li't out, an' I run an' I run, an' I run an' I run, twell I foun' myself nigh over to Chèrrypit again! Yessir!"

"Oh! O-o-o oo-o-oh! What *was* it?" asked Bobs. Bunny, apparently, was too overcome for speech.

Donald and Jack were broadly grinning, and Sybil's eyes and Molly's were dancing with merriment; but old Frank was utterly serious, and the twins were tense with excitement.

"W'at it was?" Uncle Frank repeated. "W'at it was? How you reckon I know w'at it was? You reckon ol' Frank stay dar to fin' out w'at it was! No, siree! Not ol' Frank!"

"I done tol' de Major all about it, next mornin', an' he had de three-year-olds hitched up to de buggy right away, an' him an' me drove over to Miss Sally's ol' place over to Blackwater. We got down outen de buggy

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an' went back to de gyardin, an' 'twas all grown up, an' dere wasn't any paths like dey used to be. But down in de cornder whar Miss Sally an' my brother an' me buried de silver was a grea-a-at big ho-o-ole, like somebody been a-diggin'!

"'Dere, Frank,' says de Major, 'now you see what you done, you ol' fool! You dug up Miss Sally's silver for dat black rascal to tote away!' But I says, 'No, sir, Major! I nuvver dug dat hole! Look down yonder, Major—yonder's de marks ob *claws*!'"

"Oh!" Bunny exclaimed, with a long breath. "And what made the marks of claws?"

"What made 'em?" Uncle Frank repeated. "Ain't flyin' black cats got claws? Ain't tame screech-owls got claws? Huh? Answer me dat!"

That evening, the twins repeated the story as well as they could to the company assembled on the Fordham piazza. When they ended, with their evident belief in the tame screech-owls and the flying black cats, everyone there shouted with laughter.

"Did that old darkey really dig up Sally's lost silver, Tom?" the Colonel asked, wiping

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away the tears, when he could laugh no longer.

"I reckon he did, William," Mr. Rutherford replied. "I found out afterward that the 'diviner' was born on Sally's place, and was one of the negroes who left in war-time. He knew he had only to play on old Frank's simplicity and superstition. I reckon he really got the silver, for he was never seen around here again."

But the twins would not have it that way, and Sybil backed them up in their protests. "Oh, let us have it a mystery," she cried. "We want to believe it a mystery, don't we, girls? And I do so love the flying black cats and tame screech-owls!"

And when the Colonel finally drove home with his three guests, Bunny and Bobs were singing, at the tops of their excited voices, the final words of old Frank's famous ballad:

And out of her grave there grew a red rose,
And out of Lord Lovell's a brier, rier, rier,
And out of Lord Lovell's a brier!

XVI

JACK

SUMMER in the Chesapeake country is a radiant succession of glowing days and fragrant nights. Small wonder is it that the first Lord Baron of Baltimore, sailing northward on a pleasure voyage with his hosts of the young Colony of Virginia, should have coveted those sun-kissed shores and breeze-swept waters; small wonder, too, that once his own by virtue of a kingly gift, he should have deemed that lovely province worthy to bear the name of the beautiful queen of his benefactor. Yet even the rosiest dreams of Baron Baltimore could not have disclosed the beauty of the present. Even to the utmost glory of nature something is added by the loving touch of man; along these shores generations of men and women have been born, have loved and worked, have lived and died, and the face of the land bears testimony of

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it. Vine-grown churches of stone, white-pillared court-houses, homes stately and beautiful—these are the jewels placed here by man in nature's setting. And over it all there hangs a charm like the charm of old laces laid away by hands long dead, like the scent of lavender in an old chest, like the pathos of the faded ribbon that binds a bundle of yellowed love-letters. It is a country, too, where things ripen early, from the fruits of the fields to the emotions of the human heart. Old tales are still told there of ante-bellum romance, of lovely girls clustering in wide white skirts on the broad verandas, and gallant youths—sometimes a trifle wild—who courted them with songs and dances and lace-bordered bouquets, and sighs and serenades. Age which recounts and youth which listens to these tales is apt to forget that the moon is not always at the full, that roses and jasmine are not always in bloom. But what matter? History is never made; life goes on, and love!

To the young Crawfords and the friends they made in Maryland, what a wonderful summer it was! How full were the days, how beautiful the nights! What good times there were, what rides and drives, what

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gaiety on the water, what dances and moonlight tête-à-têtes! Their elders saw to it that their days were care-free; and those outside of Montebello, touched by the old Colonel's return to the neighborhood life, wishing to show their appreciation of his courageous effort, glad to do it in the way he must have preferred, did all they could for his three guests. If the twins were soon known as the life of the neighborhood, it was Sybil, of course, about whom things were centered. It was she for whom the parties were given, as much for the sake of her own charm as because the Colonel so evidently held her dear. If people wondered not a little at the coincidence of her name, they were well-mannered, and their good breeding was emphasized, especially on that subject, by their kindness of heart. Sybil herself, and her intimate friends, Molly and Donald and Jack, knew and admitted that there was something in the courtesy of the older people toward herself, or toward the Colonel, or toward the state of things at Montebello, which they could not understand. Yet not even Molly found it possible to question her grandfather on that subject. Plainly it was something which

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was not to be spoken of. Three old people had lived for years on the estate of Montebello, either shutting themselves off from the world or having its doors closed to them; then, at the coming of a young girl who bore a well-remembered name, two of them came out of their retirement, and at a touch the door of their world had swung wide open. It was indeed beyond the understanding of the young people, a page which they could not read—strange, strange.

More and more, as the summer weeks passed, were the two households of Fordham and Montebello drawn together.

"What's the matter with *you*, young woman?" the Colonel asked Roberta, one day, when he found her sitting quite alone in the middle of the largest sofa in the front drawing-room.

"I'm communing," said Bobs, soberly.

"Eh?" said the Colonel, stepping inside the door, and looking around the room for Abundance. "What's that? Some new game? Eh?"

"No, sir. It's—it's—I think it's a very good thing for everybody to commune in

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secret with their own souls for a short while every day."

The Colonel nearly choked over a desire to laugh. "Oh, pardon me," he said. "I would not for worlds intrude," and went out into the hall again with the step a person uses on leaving the quiet of an empty church.

Shaking his head, as if to say that the way of the twins was beyond him, he went into his library, for Sybil was riding with Donald and the Rutherfords, and whenever she was away the Colonel had an undefined sense of loneliness, which showed itself in restlessness.

But strange sounds checked his advance. Abundance was curled up in his big wing-chair by the window, her feet tucked comfortably under her, a large volume upon her knees. She looked up at him with traces of tears on her face.

"Now bless my soul!" the Colonel exclaimed. "And what's the matter with *you*?"

Bunny's eyes were dewy, and she spoke with quivering lips. "It's—nothing! I—w-was just—reading—about the—l-lily maid—and it always makes me——"

Her head went down again over her book, and the Colonel's hand went up to his mouth.

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"I j-just—love it—don't you?—where—where—'the meats became as wormwood'—and — where — oh! — where — 'groaned Sir L-launcelot—in—r-remorseful pain!' I think there's quite a good deal that's painful—about—love, don't you?"

Delicious weeping checked her further quotation, and the Colonel went hastily out of the room. He was shaking with laughter. Evidently his place to-day was not with the dolorous twins, what with their secret communings with their souls and their Maids of Astolat and—he leaned against the wall, weak with laughter—and their wormwood and remorseful pain and love! What on earth was the matter with them?

He went out to the veranda, looked over the broad acres of his lawn—every place seemed curiously empty. But Sophia was somewhere in the house—he would find Sophia! In other days he would have stood still and roared for her; now he walked through the hall, his hands under the tails of his coat, through the back drawing-room, crossed to the dining-room, opened the door into the pantry——

Miss Sophia was seated before a large

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table, with jars and tumblers of preserved fruit before her, at her left hand a pile of neatly cut rounds of white paper, at her right a dish of beaten-up white-of-egg, in front of her a saucer of brandy. It was the moment of a household ceremony, but Miss Sophia's heart was not in it. Her hands lay idle in her lap!

"Oh, Brother!" she said, as the Colonel opened the door. But she said it precisely as she would have said "Oh, Pussy," if he had been the cat, or "Oh, Shem," if Shem had come in with another tray of glasses. It was perfectly evident that her mind was on something else. The Colonel felt bewildered.

"God bless my soul!" he exclaimed. "What in heaven's name is the matter with everybody to-day? There's something wrong—can't tell *me*—something going on—something——"

"I'm afraid there is," said Miss Sophia.

The Colonel started, looked alarmed, came nearer.

"What do you mean, Sister?" he asked. It had been fifty years or more since he had called her by the familiar title of her childhood. She flushed, and a new dignity came into her manner as she looked up at him.

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She even laid her hand, without a quiver, over the Colonel's, where it rested upon the pantry table.

"It's our little girl, our Sybil," she said. "Haven't you seen it coming, Brother?"

He stared at this new Sophia, from whom, for the moment at least, all the quivering childishness had fled.

"Why, no, Sophia! I haven't noticed anything. What are you trying to tell me?"

"Haven't you noticed—Jack Rutherford—his eyes—when he looks at Sybil—and—and—how she flushes up and—puts on her white muslin—and——"

"Oh! Is that all?" said the Colonel, standing up straight again. "Pshaw, Sophia, it's a little harmless flirtation, white muslins and such! Every pretty girl——"

But the Colonel paused, as if something new had come to him. His brows drew down. "Why, it's nonsense! Impossible! He's but a boy! A baby!"

Miss Sophia was quite still, looking up at him—not a flutter, not a tremble, of her little hands. "Just his father's age, Brother, when he—and Sybilla, our own Sybilla, was as young as Sybil when she—when—you——"

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The Colonel put a hand before his face, as if to ward off a blow. "Don't!" he said, and moved toward the door, touching things as he passed quite as if he did not see them. But in the doorway he turned, paused, and said, kindly:

"It's all nonsense, Sophia! I'll speak to her myself!"

Sybil little knew what was troubling the Colonel, as she rode through the woods with the young man in question on that September afternoon. The little party of four had ridden away in the early morning, for there was to be a tennis match in St. Anne's that afternoon, preceded by a luncheon at Major Nicholson's. It was long past five when the horses were brought around for the return, and Molly, who was going out again in the evening, declared that she must ride on in haste.

"But Jack will go home with you, Sybil dear." Then, at sight of something in Sybil's eyes, she hastened to add, "I *must* take Donald back with me, Sybil, for he never could make it in time, on Grayling, if he goes home with you first."

Sybil knew that her excuse was absurd, but Jack was holding his hands for her to mount;

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and Donald was already up and off with Molly, before she could think of a protest. For a few miles their way was the same, and they rode in ranks as close as the horses permitted. Then Molly and Don, waving good-bye, turned off to the left, and Sybil's heart insensibly began to beat faster as Jack urged Winnie, his black mare, up beside Damascus. Damascus was always shy of other horses; curiously enough, Winnie was one of the very few that he permitted to run close. The mare was as beautiful, as splendid, in her way, as the Arabian in his. The twins had often thrilled at sight of Jack upon Winnie, for he was a skilled and fearless horseman, riding motionless, except for the motion of the horse, with the long stirrups of the Southerner, apparently an inseparable part of his mount.

"Oh, Sybil," Bunny had sighed, one day, "if he only wore a flying cloak and spurs and a sword! Wouldn't he be just a perfect lover?"

"Oh, wouldn't he?" Bobs had agreed. "But his eyes are perfect, anyway! I just adore those black eyes!"

But Sybil had come to know a good deal

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more about those black eyes of his than Bobs. It was because she could not forget them that she urged Damascus now, with a tiny kick which sent him forward in great leaps. But Jack suspected her ruse, smiled, and kept serenely beside her. He suspected, too, that she was frightened—God bless her! Afraid—and of him?

He began to talk to her, first about the afternoon; then about a house they saw across the fields, an old story of by-gone days which had been staged there; then of another story which it suggested, a tale of his own ancestors, of how one of them had won his wife, the beauty of three States. And that tale led on to another, the story of the first Sybilla Rutherford.

“So she said she didn’t care what became of the estates, nor the title, either; she said she’d marry the man she loved—that was Floyd Rutherford—and the cousin might have the land, since that was all that seemed to matter to him. And she did marry Floyd, too; and they came over to Virginia, and then up here. And since then there’s always been a Sybilla Rutherford, you know, until—until—well, I don’t know the facts of the

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case, but I guess it was until there was some connection with the name that—hurt.”

Sybil was silent. She was thinking of that Sybilla who had made the memory of the name “hurt,” and wondering. They rode on through the flickering shadows of the woods, walking their horses, because of danger of overhanging boughs. They went on in silence, until Sybil, conscious that his gaze was resting upon her, felt irresistibly drawn to look at him. But when she looked her heart leaped. Again she touched Damascus, again he sprang forward, while she bent over his neck.

“Don’t do that again, dear,” Jack’s voice said, while she knew that his hand was on Damascus’s bridle, in control. “Don’t try to run away from me. You know, you can’t.”

She could feel the blood pounding in her ears, and for the life of her she could not speak. She was frightened! There was nothing in the world to be afraid of—and she was afraid! Pride alone should have steadied her—and her very hand was trembling! She had thought of so many things to say when this moment should be upon her—and she was speechless.

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Jack had drawn Winnie close to Damascus's side. Now he laid his hand over Sybil's, over the fingers that held the bridle.

"Why, you're trembling," he said, while she could have wept for shame. "You aren't afraid of me, Sybil, are you? I want you to trust me. I don't want you to be afraid of me!"

Oh, it was too absurd of her! She lifted her head, and managed to look into his face, her own flushing deeply. "I do trust you, Jack! That is why——"

It was wonderful how close together those two horses walked! Now Jack's face was flushed, too, and he looked like a man who had won a prize or—or something!

"Sybil!" he said, "Sybil, I want you to love me, too! I do love you *so*, dear!"

She was looking at Damascus's ears, as if they had never been visible until now. That horrid feeling in her own ears was quite, quite gone; but now there was an even more horrid choking in her throat, and something surely must be the matter with her heart; and the woods—she did not like those shadowy woods.

"Sybil!" Jack was saying, as if the mere

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syllables of her name gave him joy in the saying—"Sybilla! Tell me, won't you,—dear?"

"Oh, Jack!" Sybilla said, and looked at him, looked at him through tears, with a face that quivered with—pity. . . . Jack looked at her, too, for her face was the heart of the world for him; he looked, and saw, and knew, for all his youth and inexperience, that what he sought and hungered for was not there—and that what he beheld was, indeed, but pity. Not what he sought, not what his heart was pleading for, but—pity! He had asked for trust, for love—and what she was giving him was—pity!

"Sybilla!" he said again, but in a whisper now, for the dear syllables were so hard to say when his love was looking at him—like that!

"Oh, Jack," she said again, still with that look on her face that made her all the more beautiful, yet curiously removed her from him, and was so far from being what he craved for—"Oh, Jack *dear*, I *do* trust you, and I do *love* you—but——"

She did love him! With that look on her face! Love—the word he had wanted to hear

JACK

with all the brimming ardor of his first young love of a woman—and now she said it in that way. . . .

His hand fell heavily on Winnie's reins, and she drew back. They rode on through the darkening woods, came out at last into the evening glow, took their way up the drive toward the great house. . . .

"I *can't*, Sybil! I can't let it be that way! I will make you love me! I can, I know——"

She did not answer, and courage lifted its head within him.

"I can, dear, and—I swear I will! Because—there can't be anyone else—there can't be—Is there?"

She turned in the saddle and looked at him once more. Then, when he had taken a long look in return, when his eyes had sounded hers and read something in their depths, Jack bent low over Winnie's neck, wheeled about, and set off down the driveway as fast as the mare could carry him.

"Sybil says she's got a headache," said Bunny, when the supper bell had called them to the dining-room.

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The Colonel's eyes met Miss Sophia's across the table.

"I think maybe you might run up and see if the dear child needs anything, Brother," the little lady said, still with that curious new dignity upon her—almost as if she were somebody's mother!

And when the old man had taken himself up the stairs and knocked at his darling's door, and opened it, and beheld her in a little blue dressing-gown, a disconsolate heap across the foot of her bed, he came into the room and closed the door, and bent over her.

"Sybilla! So that's the way it is to be, eh, little girl?"

And Sybil rose, and threw her arms around his neck. He carried her to an armchair near the window, where the evening breeze and the call of the little owl could come in to them. He let her sob out her trouble, comforting her, and—somehow—himself most curiously comforted.

XVII

HOME AGAIN

SYBIL went north with the twins and Donald in September, with a great longing for home and Mother-dear and Dad, but also with a lump in her throat whenever she remembered Miss Sophia's tears and the Colonel's face. The old gentleman had been in a most abominable humor on the morning of their departure. He had vowed that the coffee was bad, that the weather was horrible, that the corn-cakes were burned, that Japhet had not washed the carriage; he said, "There, there!" when the twins hugged him, and demanded of everybody what all this fuss was about. He drove down to the boat with them, and—it is deplorable, but true—grunted at the good Captain's little pleasantries. When he got back to Montebello he stamped through the hall and slammed the door of his library, and would not come out to

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supper—but was discovered by Shem, at about ten o'clock that night, prowling around the pantry with a large piece of chocolate cake in one hand and a bunch of grapes in the other.

Once more at home Sybil felt as if she had been away for years. Somehow the dear familiar rooms looked smaller, and shabbier, than she had remembered them—but she loved them all the more for that. Mother-dear seemed a little tired, but the roses returned to her cheeks again when they had been home a few days. Hallam followed Sybil around as the twins had done during those memorable days before she went to Maryland; and Dad's first call, whenever he came into the house, was:

"Where's my General Manager?"

School began almost immediately for the twins, and in another week Donald, too, went off, with Dick, to Cambridge. Then there were more precious hours alone with Mother-dear and the doctor, and visits with all the old friends, and a thousand threads to be picked up, as it were. But all this was broken in upon by Sammy Wilkerson, the messenger-

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boy, who rode up on his bicycle one day and called out from the gate:

"Hi, Sybil! Telegram for you! From that place you been to!"

For that was the way with Sammy Wilkerson; and, as Bunny said, it was plain to be seen what sort of man *he* would grow up into—and what a pity it was that he couldn't grow up into an old lady, because he *would* so enjoy finding out everything about everybody and telling everybody else. The doctor rather thought Sammy Wilkerson might enjoy doing that when he grew up, even though he could not be an old lady—and Bobs was quite sure that when she was as old as Sybil she'd like to hear a Sammy Wilkerson call *her* by her first name! Some people, etc. . . .

The telegram was from Molly, and the twins quite reveled in her careless disregard of the number of words.

Don't be alarmed, but Miss Sophia and I think the Colonel needs you. Do come if you can.

MOLLY.

"Of course you must go," said Mother-dear, without a moment's hesitation, and went

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off at once to have the big trunk brought down from the attic again.

"It will be for only a month or two more," Sybil said, as once again she tearfully bade them all good-by. But the journey this time was far different from that other one, in the spring. There were no more doubts or fears. On the contrary, she was going home—and how curious that was! Home was in dear South Wickham; of course it was! Yet for Montebello she was conscious of a different love, the affection one has for something—it seemed absurd to put it that way—but it was almost the affection one has for something that is in one's very blood . . .

Captain Woollett, as jovial as ever, lent her his glass, as they rounded Cherrypit, so that she could make out the figure of the Colonel awaiting her on the wharf. But only Miss Sophia stood there, with Molly, yet a Miss Sophia so fluttering with happiness and excitement that Sybil could be sure all was well—at home!

"Oh, my dear," the little lady confided, on the way up from the wharf, "dear Brother has been in such a shocking humor ever since you left! He—he has—er—I hate to say it,

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but he has raised his voice—ve-ry often, my dear! He has kept us all actually jumping, really!”

She found him before a blazing fire in the library—in the big wing-chair which had been Bunny’s nest on a memorable day—with his poor foot on a hassock. He grasped her hands as if he could never again let them go, but drew his eyebrows down into a most ferocious frown; yet all he said was:

“What made your boat so late, hey? Can’t count on anything, these days! Everything late! Boats late, meals late—you Shem! Confound that nigger! Shem! You go ask Sair’ Ann what’s the matter with supper! Tell her if supper’s late again I’ll—I’ll have Torm’s wife do the cooking! You——”

But Sybil’s arms were around his neck, and her cheek against his hair, and she was laughing at him.

“Why, Uncle! W-h-y! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself! It isn’t anywhere near supper time! Oh, oh, to be so cross—just when I’ve come back home!”

The Colonel reached up and took her hands again. For a moment he did not speak, and Sybil was sure he was glad that she

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stood back of him and could not see his face. Then he said in quite a different tone:

"There, there! Run along! Take off that hat—make yourself look as if you hadn't been away—from *home*, Sybilla!"

She sat on the arm of his chair that evening, while Miss Sophia was busy with her knitting on the other side of the hearth, and told them all about the other home, and the dear ones she had left.

"The twins wanted to come with me," she said. "Bobs is crocheting you a pair of pale-blue bedroom slippers, and took it quite hard that I wouldn't wait until they were finished. Bunny is making you a frame for their picture, but they've sent the picture now, with their very best love, Uncle!"

"Bless their hearts!" said the Colonel. "How I wish they belonged to me! I wish you all did! I've missed you, minx!"

There were many evidences that he had missed her, and many preparations for her return. There was a new boathouse at the foot of the lawn, for one thing, and the key of it lay on her bureau; when she investigated it next day she found a little, safe, flat-bottomed catboat and a beautiful cedar canoe

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with places for two paddles. She remembered that Donald had been showing her a catalogue of just such canoes, one evening on the front steps, while the Colonel looked on. Then there was a large open-front stove set up in her room, and new chintz covers over the upholstered pieces; and at the stable there was a new phaeton for Marguerite, and a window had been cut in Damascus's box-stall, so that he could look out for her as she ran down every morning with his dainties.

She had as much to do as if she had been away from home for years, instead of only having returned to make a second visit. Everywhere in the neighborhood she was welcomed, by everyone made to feel that she had come back home. Every afternoon there was a carriage or two before the door, every evening some strange saddle-horses taken around to the stable, while their owners sat on the veranda or before the big fire in the hall. The Colonel grumbled, but there was in his eyes a gleam of satisfaction at her popularity.

Molly came often to "spend the night," and there were midnight talks upstairs which

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were, of course, far more confidential than any others.

"I've never asked you what you did to my Jack," said Molly, during the first of these, "but I suppose I know."

"Oh, please, don't," Sybil begged, flushing, and looking distressed, and lovely, even to Molly's new jealousy—a jealousy on behalf of the beloved brother who had been denied the wish of his heart.

"Well, I won't; only—I don't see why you're such a clam!"

Sybil noticed that Molly avoided talking about Donald; but she thought it was probably due to the fact that Molly was having such a very great deal to say at that time about Berkeley Hart. As for Donald himself, the constraint that had grown up between them during the summer seemed to wear over into the fall. His letters were full of college happenings, as of old; yet there began to creep into them a new element which gradually made their coming something of an excitement. They were just different; and every girl knows what "different" can mean! She had always loved the other kind of letters; yet she liked the new ones none the less.

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The friendship with Molly had developed into one of those deeply affectionate companionships that are so dear to girls; every day saw them riding together with the Colonel or Mr. Rutherford, or sailing the *Blue Wing* or Sybil's little *Sea Nettle* under Uncle Frank's directions, or out in the canoe, with Molly in the bow learning to paddle. There was only one thing which the girls could not share, and that was Sybil's friendship with the Hermit. She had asked him, one day, for permission to bring Molly with her; but the old man seemed to shrink into himself at the suggestion.

"I want my two friends to meet, you see!" Sybil said, and her smile would have disarmed the Colonel immediately. But the Hermit raised a protesting hand.

"I must not let you bring your friend here," he said. "I must not!"

"But *I* come!" she cried.

"Yes, you come! But you came by accident, at first; and you are—Sybilla!"

There was such a world of sadness in his voice that she was moved with pity. "Mr. John, I do not understand," she said. "Why

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do you live here alone? Why do you shun people?"

She wondered whether she had gone too far, but he answered her simply, without surprise or anger.

He smiled the saddest, most wistful little smile she had ever seen; it was so sad that it brought the tears to her eyes. "Ah, my child, if I told you that, you would pass me by, as the world does! So it is best untold; for I—I should miss you, Sybilla!"

"Oh, Mr. John! Please forget that I asked! Don't tell me! Not that I'm not perfectly certain you have done nothing wrong! I know you have not—you *could* not! And I would *not* pass you by! You are my friend!"

He did not reply, until she presently asked again:

"You really will not let me bring Molly to see you?"

But again he shook his head, and said, "Better not! Better not!"

XVIII

THE STORM

THE brilliant coloring of autumn seemed to flash out in a night, with the first frost; and the snappy freshness, coming after the usual languorous mildness of October, was so exhilarating that the girls inclined more and more to out-of-door amusements. Nothing could have been more delightful than to ride 'cross country all morning, sometimes with the hunters, sometimes alone together, allowing Damascus and Molly's Apollo to fly over fields and fences at will, and in the afternoon to paddle down Cherrypit in the little canoe, then to float back with the tide or rest in some sheltered inlet.

It was on such an afternoon, when the air was breathlessly still, and the haze of Indian summer veiled the horizon and hovered, wraithlike, among the pine woods, that the

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girls set forth to carry out a project which they had long had in mind.

They had paddled in and out of the inlets that opened into the broader Cherrypit, where the tide came swiftly up to meet the fresh water; and, as their skill in paddling grew, their ambitions grew also. They had never been forbidden to go beyond the mouth of the Creek, because no one had dreamed of their being daring enough to try it; yet that was the project which now tempted them. To skim down Cherrypit, out past the Fordham orchards and the Montebello fields and woods, around Cecil's Point to the Bay, and down the shore of the Bay to the little narrow creek that made the southern boundary of Montebello—that was their intended voyage. They knew well enough how dangerous it would be; the great Bay in early November is far from resembling a mill-pond. But it was the danger which tempted them; the voyage would be a feat to be rather proud of.

Sybil laughed gleefully as she turned the canoe northwards from the mouth of the Creek. "This was the day of all days to try it, Molly," she said. "Did you ever see the Bay smoother?"

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Molly, more experienced in Maryland weather-signs, looked over her shoulder toward the west. "It is altogether too calm," she said. "I wish I could see over the tops of those trees!"

"Oh, it's too late in the season for a thunder-storm," Sybil declared, with all the boldness of ignorance.

But almost as she spoke the sky began to grow yellow. A bird flew across their track, with short, frightened cries, making hastily for the shelter of the shore; and a deeper hush seemed to fall upon the water, which began to look oily and black.

"Late or not, there's a storm coming, and these yellow ones are the worst," Molly said. "Paddle faster!"

"Long strokes, then," Sybil replied. "Perhaps we had better run ashore!"

"But look! There's no place to land!" cried Molly. "That sandy cliff is impossible! We shall just *have* to make the little creek!"

For a mile they paddled on, desperately now, without speaking. The water seemed to be curling up, as if some force beneath were lifting it. There was a flash or two of

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lightning from the west. The air suddenly became as hot as the blast of a furnace.

Their breath was coming in short, quick gasps, and Molly's strokes were beginning to grow weaker.

Again a bird flew past, making for shore, flying low, flying swiftly, not wasting its breath in cries, but spending its little energy on winning to safety. Sybil could hear Molly's breath, and another sound came across the waters, a sound as of some great whisper. Then, from the west, it was as if a gray veil was spread upon the Bay—the rain! Yet the veil passed, or was withdrawn as if the storm was not yet ready to outpour itself; and again that horrible, oily calmness, again the lifting of the water. She strained against her paddle, and all the while she seemed to be saying to herself, foolishly, over and over:

"Good form! Good form! That's the way to win!" as if it were a race she was paddling.

"Oh, I can't!" Molly gasped, yet all the while kept on, stroke by stroke with Sybil's, the canoe flashing through the water that seemed to press against its bow like some conscious restraining force.

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There was a paling of the yellow near the western horizon, a darkening of the gray overhead—a clash and rattle of thunder, and lightning that seemed to pour itself upon the Bay.

A cry from Molly—and Sybil glanced quickly over her shoulder. Something brown, that was not woods or field, was revealed in that quick look.

“The Hermit’s!” she cried. “Molly! The Hermit has a little boat-landing over there—hidden behind those bushes! I think we can make it!”

She was conscious of a reply from Molly that was half a sob. They paddled wildly for a few minutes; then Sybil turned the canoe—too suddenly, as if in response to the thundering crash that snapped and rang and reverberated from the heavens, with flash after blinding flash of lightning, and a suddenly descending darkness. She thought she heard an answering call to Molly’s sharp cry. Then something cold closed over her, and the living world went out, like the flame of a candle.

When consciousness fought its way back, through the weight on her chest and the

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pounding in her ears, it was to welcome, first of all, the warmth of the hot things all around her and of the blankets over her. Passively, she accepted the fact that she had awakened in a warm room, on a couch, with kindly, awkward hands ministering to her, and someone sobbing not far away. With equal passiveness she remembered that she had gone to sleep—if sleep it was—with cold waters drawing her down, under a sky that seemed full of thunder and lightning and roaring gusts of wind. Nothing mattered very much, now that she was warm and safe; but she wished someone would remove the weight that was pressing on her chest. With the wish she stirred, and a face bent over her, and someone spoke in a voice that seemed to be the Hermit's—or was it her uncle's?"

"Don't be frightened, Sybilla! You are safe—quite safe."

Then the sobbing ceased, and someone else bent over the couch where she lay. It might have been Molly, she thought; but why was Molly's hair all wet?

"Is she alive? Is she really alive?" Molly's

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voice cried ; and the question seemed so foolish that Sybil faintly smiled.

"Yes, indeed !" the Hermit declared. "She's as much alive as you are ! Come now, let me wrap you up in front of the fire, while she goes to sleep again !"

But Sybil did not go to sleep. She was so very comfortable, just lying there in the warmth ! She watched the Hermit push his big chair up before the fire, and help Molly into it, and tuck more blankets all around her. She watched him stoop and lift something steaming from the hearth, and pour part of it into a cup for Molly. She watched him go to a window and look out, as if he were expecting someone. And after what seemed a long, long time she heard wheels outside, and voices.

The Hermit heard them, too ; he stood beside her couch, and his face looked almost as white as his hair. Molly jumped up as the door opened, and with a little cry was in her grandfather's arms before he knew it, while Clarissy, the same who was now the Rutherfords' cook but used to be Molly's mammy, was trying to take Molly into her own arms.

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Sybil wondered why the tears were streaming down Clarissy's cheeks. . . .

Then Mr. Rutherford came forward, holding out both his hands to the Hermit. Mr. John stood for a moment as if he did not quite know what to do. But he must have come to a decision because, when Mr. Rutherford began to speak, in that queer, shaking voice, he was certainly holding Mr. John's hands!

"John, John," he said, "there has been enough of this! I have wanted for years to take your hand and say, 'Let us forget the years between!' John, let me send for William!"

But the Hermit shook his head, and it all seemed so queer and incomprehensible and altogether topsy-turvy that Sybil closed her eyes and went to sleep again, or off into that far place where sleep seemed to be waiting for her with welcoming arms.

When she awoke again a great many people seemed to be talking all at once, and a great many others seemed to be warning them to keep quiet; but after a moment she found that it was only Shem and Jinny and Sair'

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Ann and Miss Sophia who were all talking together, while the Colonel in a trembling voice was saying over and over, as he carried her into the house at Montebello:

"Be quiet! Be quiet, I say! You Shem! Stop that whimpering! Sophia, will you behave like a sensible woman? Sair' Ann, open that door!"

Then he would stop trying to roar at them to say to someone else, "Oh, my little girl! Oh, my little girl! Sybilla! My little girl!" and his voice was shaking just as Mr. Rutherford's had been at the Hermit's house. She looked around for the Hermit, but he was not there; old Daniel was standing on the piazza with Shem, but she wanted the Hermit.

It was hard to lift her hand, but she managed to raise it to her uncle's cheek. "Mr. John!" she murmured, and it seemed that her uncle understood.

He was holding her now on his knees, all bundled up in the Hermit's blankets as she still was, before a roaring fire in his library, while Sair' Ann was kneeling down in front of them and rubbing Sybil's feet, and Cousin Sophia was fluttering about like a frightened moth.

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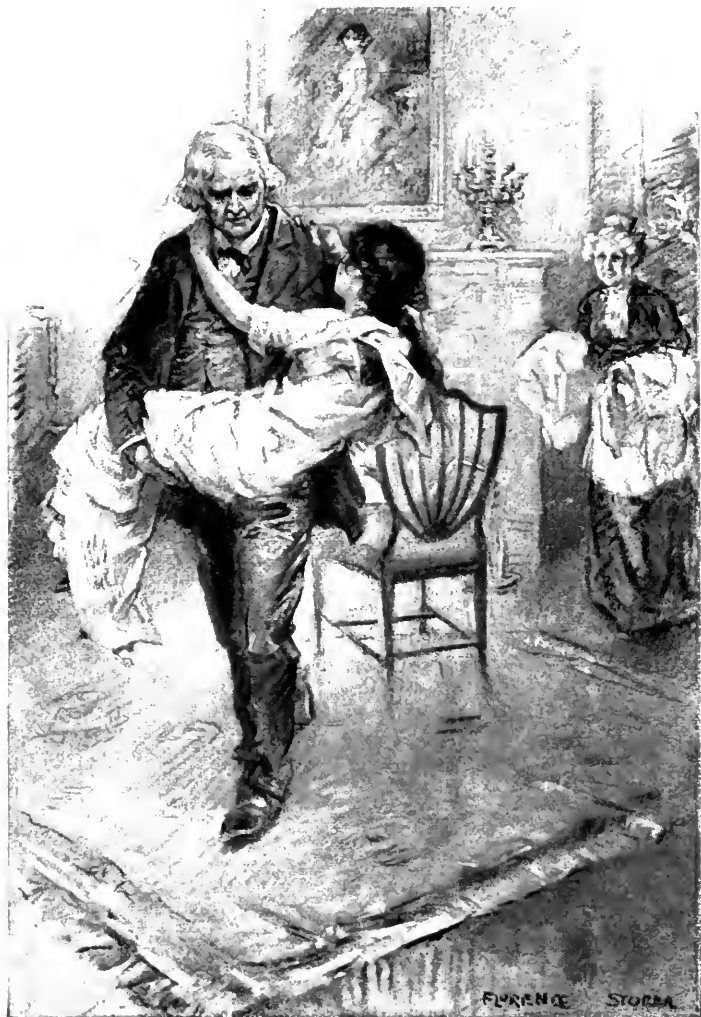
"Yes, yes, my darling," her uncle was saying, "we will bring him! John shall come to Sybilla! Oh, my little girl! My little girl!"

Then someone came in who seemed to take authority over them all.

"Come now, Colonel," he said, laying a kindly hand on the old gentleman's shoulder, and holding Sybilla's wrist, just as Dad would have done, "come now, this is too exciting for this little lady, sir! We must get her to bed at once!"

"Then open that door, Sophia," the Colonel commanded, as if he were saying something which was quite momentous, and bore her through the door of memory, into the sacred room that had been his wife's.

Sybil was not too weak to know where he was taking her, not too weak to look around. Jinny was already kneeling before the fireplace, lighting the fire, and Shem and Sair' Ann were bustling around, and—oh, wonder of all that was wonderful—over the broad white mantel shelf, between the lighted candle-sconces, there hung a portrait, life-sized, of a girl in white, a girl with deep gray eyes and dark hair that curled over her shoulders. Her chin was raised just a trifle, her lips wore



"He bore her....into the sacred room that had been his wife's."



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a little teasing smile, her hand was playing with the blue ribbon of her sash—a portrait—surely, surely—of Sybil's very self, were it not for the wide hoop-skirt and the quaint hair bracelet on the arm. . . .

For days after that the portrait seemed to smile down upon her through long hours when the weight on her chest changed to intolerable pain, and people tiptoed about the room, and spoke only in whispers, and no one but Mr. John—which proved that it was a dream—could persuade the Colonel to leave the chair beside her bed. At first it was the strange doctor who stayed in the room so many hours, and bent over her so often; then it was Dad, her own Dad; and after he came the pain in her chest grew better.

Then one day she awoke to a realization that the pain was gone, that she was hungry, and glad to see the sunlight. Dad was standing at the foot of her bed, smiling at her while he talked with the Colonel; the old gentleman was still in the chair beside her, where she had seen him whenever she awakened during such a long time. They were talking about very uninteresting things, like the state of the country and crops, while she wanted

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them to know how hungry she was. She wanted them to talk to her! So she pinched the Colonel's hand where it lay on the coverlet.

He jumped, and looked down at her.

"Bless my soul!" he cried. "Bless my soul! Did you see what that minx did, Robert?"

Sybil smiled. "I want some fried chicken and crabs and peach marmalade!" she said, in quite a strong little voice, all things considered.

The doctor laughed, while the Colonel looked alarmed, as if he thought she were dreaming again.

"Oh, ho!" said Dad. "So that's the order of the day, is it? I guess she's getting well, Colonel!"

"Are you sure it's not a relapse?" the old gentleman asked, the greatest anxiety in his tone.

This time Sybil laughed, too. "It will be worse than that if I don't get something to eat soon!" she declared.

"You may have every drop of a glass of milk," Dad said, as if he were giving her a feast; and, while Sybil protested, she drank, and the Colonel was so overjoyed that he marched off to the kitchen and ordered Sair'

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Ann to prepare a full supply of everything that his darling liked best, from crab cakes to strawberry whip, from chocolate cake and fried chicken to peach ice cream and spoon-bread, and who cared if things *were* out of season, for wasn't it absolutely imperative that when the doctor should allow her to begin to eat, nothing might be found wanting?

While the Colonel was gone, Dad took his place beside Sybil. For a while she was content to hold his hand and smile back at him while he talked to her about everyone at home; but presently she looked up at the portrait over the mantel. She felt Dad's hand tighten over hers when his look followed her own; then she asked:

"Daddy, what does it all mean?"

For a moment he did not answer; but at last he said:

"It's a long story, my darling! Won't you wait until you are stronger to hear it?"

She sighed. "If you say so, Daddy! But it puzzles me sometimes until it makes my head hurt!"

The doctor smiled. "Perhaps that is not altogether the cause of the poor little head's hurting. You have been very ill, Sybil."

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"Yes, I know!"

The doctor smiled again. "And what do you think has become of that unfortunate canoe?" he asked. Sybil loved Dad's way of never scolding; yet sometimes scolding would have hurt less than to have everything left to your own conscience!

"I'm sure I don't know!" she said, smiling faintly and looking very much ashamed.

"The day we were sure you would get well the Colonel had it brought up to the lawn in front of the house; and that night, Sybil, he made a magnificent bonfire of it!"

"Oh, Daddy!" she laughed. "Oh, isn't he the funniest old child that ever, ever lived!"

But she was not going to be diverted from her first question. "Daddy," she asked, "what was your really-truly reason for sending me down here to visit?"

The doctor opened his eyes very wide. "Dear me! Have you forgotten that the Colonel wanted to make a certain experiment?"

"I have not forgotten, Daddy. But—but I'm beginning to think it's my right to know more!"

The doctor arose, took a turn or two about

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the room, and at length stood beside her with a very serious face.

"It is your right, Sybil, my daughter," he said. "You shall be told everything the day after you are well enough to sit up before the fire!"

Then he bent down and kissed her on the forehead. "You are the most precious gift Mother-dear and I ever had, little girl," he said. "Now go to sleep, and try to get well soon!"

XIX

THE DOOR OF MEMORY

AT last the day came when Sybil could sit up in the big chair before the fire, directly below the pictured smiling face that might have been her own. There she held a little court, for everyone came in to pay their respects to "Missy," or bring some little offering of thanksgiving. Torm's youngsters had a gift of hickory nuts and a kitten, Japhet led Damascus past the window, and Miss Sophia put a pale-blue shawl that she had just finished around Sybil's shoulders. The Colonel wandered restlessly in and out of the room; but Mr. John took a chair beside Sybil's and sat smiling at her in great contentment, quite forgetting the little brown book in which his finger was keeping a place. Sometimes he looked up at the other face above the mantel; but it seemed as if his eyes loved best to rest upon the living one.

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"Mr. John, did you know that other Sybilla?" she asked him.

Before answering, the Hermit looked up at Doctor Crawford, who was leaning against the mantel, and smiled.

"And so it is, Robert," he said. "Time passes, and we are asked such a question as that!" Then, to Sybil, "I knew her, yes, my dear."

There was something curious in his tone, something certain to set her wondering. She looked up at the doctor. "You know you have a story to tell me, Daddy!"

"Yes, my darling. But not to-day—not until you are stronger."

"But I do so want to hear it, Father. I think and think about it, until it makes my head ache. It is worse than looking at the pieces of a puzzle, and not being able to put them together."

"To-morrow, then, if you are as well as to-day," the doctor decided.

The Hermit sat with bowed head for a while, as if he were thinking of old, sad things; then he put his hand on Sybil's and said:

"My dear, when you hear—that story—will

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you try to remember, for an old man's sake, that there is only One who is qualified to be the judge of human actions?"

She looked at him in silence for a moment or two, then said, "I will try, Mr. John. But I don't understand."

"That's right, that's all right," the old man said. "And as for understanding—my child, understanding is only the handmaid of faith!"

The Colonel had been so constant an attendant while she was still in bed that his restless wandering in and out of the room to-day seemed somewhat strange; and in a return of her old humor Sybil began to tease him about it.

"Uncle, what *is* the matter with you? You are wandering around like the possessor of an uneasy conscience! Or have you stayed with me so much that you're in need of exercise?"

He had been in a most angelic mood during all her illness, patient and gentle, with not so much as a growl to be heard; but now he stood looking down at her for a moment, frowning.

Then he said, "Humph!" and stalked out of the room!

Sybil was aghast. "Mercy! What *is* the

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matter with him?" she asked her father. "I've said lots worse things than that to him, time and again, without making him cross! Oh, Daddy, do please go tell him I'm sorry! I don't want to hurt the dear's feelings!"

But the Hermit, with that quiet, patient smile of his, which seemed to hold so much of understanding and forgiveness and pity, said, "Teasing sometimes strikes home, my dear! Haven't you ever noticed that?"

When the next day came, and she was again in the big chair, waiting for Doctor Crawford to begin his story, the Colonel came into the room wearing a most determined manner. He had evidently braced himself to say something. He stood in front of the hearth, his hands under his coat-tails, looking down at her. But she was never to hear the speech the Colonel had prepared, if such it was, for the old gentleman only turned abruptly on his heel once more and left the room.

Doctor Crawford smiled. "The Colonel is rather upset, I'm afraid. He's not sure how you are going to feel about what I have to tell you. I think you must have guessed, Sybil, that it concerns you both."

She was still pale from her illness, yet it

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seemed to the doctor that for the moment she grew even paler.

"Yes, Father," she said; and the doctor, sitting close to her, with his kind hand over hers, began his story.

"At the time of the opening of the great Civil War, my Sybil, this large estate of Montebello was a scene of busy plantation life, where more than two hundred people worked together for the welfare and happiness of all; and this old house was as the heart and brain of the system. It had long been the home of a vigorous family life; but when the war came the family consisted only of a beloved, invalid mother, a timid young girl, and twin brothers."

"Oh! oh!" cried Sybil. "Oh, Daddy! Not——"

The doctor nodded. "Yes! Twin brothers, William and John. But for all that they were twins, their characters differed widely. William was active and gay, John was studious and quiet. William was the general favorite, everyone's friend; but it seemed that the mother, as if to make up to John for Wil-

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liam's greater popularity, centered all her love upon him. At any rate, John was most decidedly his mother's favorite.

"Well, Fort Sumter fell, and war was declared, and William, of course, was one of the first to rush off and enlist. John stayed at home. But people at first thought nothing of that. There were the two women, helpless and timid, for one thing; and at that time no one believed that the war would last longer than the first battle, anyway. Yet that limit was extended to another month, and another; a year passed, and still there was war. By that time people knew how grim and horrible it was, too, and when the call for more men went through the South, it drew old and young alike from their homes. They say that at one time there was not a white man of fighting age in all this county—except John. He was still here."

"Then there must have been a reason, and a good one!" Sybil cried.

"Of course," the doctor agreed. "But no one believed that, and John gave no explanation."

"*I* would have understood, and believed in him!" Sybil cried again.

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But the doctor looked up at the portrait of another Sybil, and shook his head. "Don't be too sure, my child!" he said. "Feeling ran high in those days, and the women of the South were the warmest of partisans. That is the portrait of another Sybil—Sybil Rutherford, she was then. Both brothers loved her. William was off to the war, on General Lee's staff, and John was right here; it would seem that John's chances must have been the better. But after a while Sybilla Rutherford began to turn her head aside when she met him on the road. So did every other woman in the county."

"Oh, I think that was cruel," Sybil said, with trembling lips.

"Yes," said the doctor, "but there was not a family in these parts but had lost some member to the great cause—and John Crockett, as they believed, was keeping himself out of danger! Well, during the last desperate year of that bitter conflict, when every man was needed at the front, William Crockett sent Shem, his body-servant, back to Montebello with a message to his brother John. Writing from General Lee's headquarters, William demanded that John report to the

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army, or acknowledge himself a coward. I have heard that General Lee himself enclosed a personal note

"Shem told his master how Mr. John went up to their mother's room with those letters, and how the servants and Miss Sophia, waiting in fear and trembling in the hall below, heard the two talking, talking, all night long. But in the morning Shem was sent back to the army—alone"

Sybil's hands were over her face, and the doctor paused here in his narrative, as one pauses when the tale of some great tragedy is told. But presently he went on again.

"Well, Richmond fell; and in course of time William came home, thin and worn and haggard enough, I dare say; but when his brother met him, out there on the front steps, John's hair, so I've been told, was as white as it is to-day"

Again the doctor paused; he was finding the story hard to tell. He stood up, took a turn or two about the room, and came back to the mantel.

"William would not so much as see John's outstretched hands.

"'You coward!' he said I've

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often wondered how those words must have sounded, from brother to brother

"‘Is that what you think of me?’ John asked.

"‘I guess the Colonel’s temper was no better in those days, when he was young and hot-headed, and just from the bitter disappointment of defeat, than it is today in his old age. There were wild, angry words, you may believe, words that could never be forgotten, words that it would need the help of Almighty God to forgive. When the torrent ceased, John asked again, ‘Do other people think that of me, too?’

"William stormed on, and again John asked:

"‘Is that what—Sybilla thinks of me?’

"‘That name is not for a coward’s lips,’ said William. Nor was that all he said. John heard him to the end; then he spoke the last words that William ever heard from *his* lips, until he came here that day when you, Sybil, called for him—for your rescuer.

"‘Very well,’ he said. ‘I will not disgrace you further. I will never cross this threshold again until you—and Sybilla—send for me!’ For he knew by that time, of course, that the

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woman he loved would marry his brother."

Sybil's eyes were brimming with tears, and her hand was over her heart, as if to still a pain there. "And she did?" she asked.

The doctor nodded. "Yes. They were married, but Sybilla died when her son was a little baby. His grandmother and Sair' Ann, his nurse, looked after Rutherford; but except when I was visiting here he must have been a lonely child. The Colonel, after the quarrel with his brother, chose to consider the family disgraced, and what with that and his wife's death, he refused to see any of his old friends, or even to allow them to come to Montebello. He and his mother and sister lived here, with the boy; John lived in that little brown house that someone had built, in years gone by, almost on the border of Montebello. John kept his word, and more; for even after his mother's death, many years later, when everything became known, and peace might have been made between the brothers at a word from either, he remained there in absolute seclusion, except for his servant, Daniel. Where the Colonel was proud, John was sensitive. I dare say he shrank from seeing himself a traitor in the eyes of his old neighbors.

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So he waited for the message from William—and Sybilla! William would not speak that word; and as for Sybilla—by that time Sybilla was long dead.”

“Oh, it was his *mother* who kept him!” Sybil cried. “I *knew* he was no coward!”

“It was his mother. She was my grandfather’s sister, born in Vermont; and although she had married a Southern man and lived here for so many years, Vermont remained the home of her affections. When the war came, she hated the South and its cause; and at the time when everyone still believed that the fighting would last only a few weeks, she made her son John promise, solemnly and by all he held most dear and sacred, never to enlist without her consent. More, she persuaded him to swear never to aid the cause of the South by any personal effort. I have often wondered what persuasions she used—her own infirmity, doubtless, his sister’s timidity, her love for him—but one cannot tell. Later, she even desired that he should join the Northern forces; but John could not do that, of course. Even if he had wanted to, it would have been to fight against his own State and his brother. So he kept his promise to

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his mother. None of us, Sybil, can so much as imagine what agony of mind it must have cost him.

"But all that was not known until years later. After John left Montebello, Aunt Crockett became a silent, moody woman; and when she died, and the whole story came out through a letter she left to be read after her death, young Rutherford Crockett was just twenty-one. I was here at the time. I was often here with him; we were closer than most cousins, as neither of us had brothers or sisters. Rutherford spent his winters with my family, going to school with me, and most of my summers were passed here. Well, Rutherford had discovered his uncle's hiding-place when he was a youngster, and used to visit him secretly; so did I. When Aunt Crockett's letter was read, Rutherford begged the Colonel to go to John, or even to let him carry a message. The Colonel refused, and the two quarreled. Father and son were almost evenly matched as to will, but not as to temper. The struggle lasted for days. But at last, when Rutherford found that nothing would move his father, he declared that he would not remain in a house where injustice

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ruled. He vowed he would maintain the family tradition of keeping his word, and warned his father that he would never return until justice was done.

"I tried to mend matters between them, but there was little I could do. Rutherford came north with me, and we settled in the same place. He wrote to his father when he was married, but received no reply. He was too proud, and too deeply hurt, to write again. Not even when you were born, Sybil, would he break that silence. Then, a year or two later, when his wife died and Rutherford himself was fatally ill, he—he gave us his little daughter, to be our own child—unless—unless her grandfather should claim her. That claim must come before all others; and it was that reservation which Mother-dear and I remembered, when the Colonel's letter came."

The doctor's story was ended. For a moment Sybil sat, with bowed head, in silence. Then, with a cry, she rose to her feet, weak though she was, and threw herself into the doctor's arms. He held her close, and let her cry out her pain and sorrow; and it was there that the Colonel saw her, when he

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opened the door and peeped around the edge of it with the expression of a small boy coming to a well-deserved trouncing.

"Look up, Sybil," said the doctor. "Here is your grandfather."

But at that Sybil's arms were all the closer about his neck, her head buried all the deeper, in the curls of her loosened hair, against the doctor's shoulder. The Colonel crossed the room on tip-toe, bent over, and laid his hand on her head.

"Sybilla!" he said, in a voice that held much of fear and pleading.

But Sybilla would not hear, or look.

"Sybil! Look up, dear! Isn't there any place in your heart for your grandfather?" the doctor remonstrated.

After waiting in vain for her answer to that, the Colonel straightened up, and squared his shoulders as if to meet some unseen burden. His voice broke, but he made a gallant effort to control it, doing his best to speak with something of his old bluster.

"I don't blame her at all! I don't blame her at all!" he said. "Not at all! Not at all! Don't suppose she'll ever want to look

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at me again! Can't forgive me! But I don't blame her at all!"

But that brought a little sound that was half laugh, half sob, from Sybil; and almost before he knew it the Colonel felt two arms around his neck, and the voice that he loved best in the world saying, laughing, crying:

"Oh, you silly old darling—Grandfather!"

Yet for him the happiest moment of all was an hour or so later, when he had answered all Sybil's questions and submitted to her scolding and caresses; and told her how he had half-guessed, from her likeness to his wife Sybilla, whose child she really was; and how he had been afraid to find out the truth, lest his hopes might prove futile; and how he had known of her visits to his brother all the while, and hoped every time she came home that she would ask him to send for the Hermit, and so enable John to keep the letter of his vow and return to Montebello when William—"and Sybilla"—should ask him to; and how she had, in fact, done that very thing the day the Hermit saved her from the water; and how he would permit no one but John to take turns with himself in sitting beside her during those unconscious hours when

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they did not know whether she would be left with them or not—the Colonel's happiest moment of all was when his brother John came quietly into the room, looking as much at home as if he had never been absent from Montebello, and seated himself near by. For a while they were all too happy to talk; but Sybil could not keep silent for long.

"Mr. John—Uncle John," she asked, returning his quick smile of pleasure, "did you guess who I was?"

The old man laughed. "No need to guess, my dear! Your father wrote me when you were born; I even have a tiny photograph of you when you were a baby. Before he died he wrote again that he intended to entrust his baby girl to Robert and his wife."

"Then you knew all the time! Oh! How could you keep such a secret as that?"

"It was your father's secret, my dear! And I have had long practice in keeping silence, you know!"

"Don't, John!" cried the Colonel, wincing as if something hurt him.

But the man who had been the Hermit smiled upon his brother, and laid a hand on his shoulder. "It's all right, William," he

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said. "It is like a dream of the night—gone by!"

"So my father wrote to Uncle John!" Sybil said, thoughtfully. "I wonder why he did not write to you again, Grandfather?"

The Colonel turned away his head, so that he would not have to see the look in the clear eyes. "He did, Sybilla. But I—burned the letter—unopened."

"Oh!" she cried, sitting up straight, the better to look at him. "Oh! You—you—you dreadful old man! Aren't you *ashamed* of yourself?" she demanded.

And the Colonel was meekness itself. "Yes, I certainly am, Sybilla! I wonder you can bear to look at me!"

XX

WHAT SYBIL SAID

SO Sybil came into her own. The neighborhood echoed with the great news. The Colonel lost little time in making what he called an official announcement, but of course everyone knew of it long before that, through the wireless telegraph of the negroes' gossip.

Miss Sophia, apparently, was the only person in the household of Montebello who had been utterly without some suspicion of the truth; the little lady was taken completely by surprise, and fell into such a state, between laughter and tears, that the doctor had to prescribe smelling salts and a glass of sherry—whereupon the Colonel said he knew something better than that, and had Shem bring up some of his great-grandfather's madeira, which Shem opened with such a pop of the cork that Miss Sophia went off into hysterics again! But when she had taken

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a sip or two of the wine, she found that she had a very great deal to say. There were questions, and exclamations, and still more questions, and then comments

"Do you know," she said, and wondered why every one seemed amused, "I *have* thought, once or twice, that the resemblance between this dear child and *our* Sybilla was quite remarkable! But then, there are so many things in this world that one cannot understand! And the name—I remember that the Reverend Mr. Faulkener, the one who was second cousin to Susy Lee, and who had the charge of St. Charles Martyr's when Mr. Houston was ill in fifty-eight, used to have a most interesting theory about people growing up like their own names, somehow, though he never made it very clear"

Sair' Ann came in, too, and fell on her knees before Sybil, clasping the girl's feet to her bosom, and kissing them over and over.

"Oh, my lamb, my lamb!" she cried. "I'se jest been pinin' an' honin' to git my two arms aroun' you, ever sence I set eyes on you! My Marse Ruffie's lil baby girl, an' de spitten image o' Miss Sybilla! Oh, my lil lamb!"

Then, when Sybil, weeping too, had com-

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forted her, the old woman arose, stood before the Colonel, and smoothed her apron.

"Marster," she said, speaking with the portentousness of the negro in time of great emotion, "Marster, I'se had my fill o' cookin'! I ain't nuvver gwine into dat kitchen to cook ano'er meal. I'se gwine spend de rest o' my days a-lookin' out for my Marse Ruffie's baby. I wants to bresh her lil haid an' wash her lil clo'es an' tuck her up in baid at night an' see her open her eyes in de mornin'! So now I tells you!"

"Why, Sair' Ann!" said the Colonel, rather weakly; and Sair' Ann had her way.

Molly rushed over, brimming with joy and excitement; and every day someone sent flowers or dishes of good things for the convalescent—in all of which the Colonel took great satisfaction.

But so much happiness was not won without causing pain to others. It was hard for Doctor and Mrs. Crawford to relinquish their claim on the child who had been as their dear eldest daughter for most of her life; and the twins stormed with grief when they learned that Sybil was not their own sister. For a few days, indeed, they were on very cool

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terms with their father and mother, attributing all the trouble to them, because they had permitted Sybil to go to Maryland in the first place, and so let the deplorable secret be known. For not ten Montebellos, nor twenty grandfathers, could compensate poor Sybil for being thrust out of the Crawford family, as Bobs expressed it.

They wrote long letters of condolence to Sybil, in which they said very stern things about old gentlemen who borrowed people and then refused to return them. The Colonel shouted with laughter over the letters.

"It's plain to be seen," he said to Sybil, "that I have offended those two! Now, what can I do to make amends for stealing you away from them, eh?"

"I think you will find," said Sybil, demurely, "that they hold me above price!"

The Colonel chuckled. "We'll see about that!" he said.

Consequently, a week or two later, the twins received peace offerings from the old gentleman, in the form of a beautiful collie puppy for Bobs and a white Persian kitten for Bunny; but harmonious relations were not fully restored until Christmas Eve.

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One afternoon a week or so before Christmas the Colonel came upon Sybil in the upstairs hall, surrounded by red and white paper and holly ribbons and balls of gilt string and a mass of gifts of every description, and the box for South Wickham on the floor beside her. It all seemed cheerful enough, at first glance; but, to the Colonel's horror and dismay, there were tears in his darling's eyes. She looked up at him with trembling lips that tried to smile, and did her best to make believe that she was not crying at all; but the Colonel was not to be deceived where she was concerned.

"Why, why, why, why!" he exclaimed, seating himself beside her. "What's all this? What's all this? Anything forgotten? Anything lost? Anything gone wrong? Want some more money? Hey?"

"Oh, no!" said Sybil, in a weak little voice. "Everything's all right!"

The Colonel drew down his eyebrows, and tried to relapse into his old manner, as he always did to hide emotion. "All right, hey? All right, is it? Then what are you whimpering for, Miss?" he demanded.

"I—I've never been away from home at

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Christmas in all my life before," said Sybil, "and I was just thinking about the stockings, and the tree, and——"

She could not go on, and she did not see that the old gentleman's eyebrows were working now at a great rate. But his voice broke as he presently asked:

"Home? Isn't this home to you, Sybilla?"

She turned and hid her face against his arm. "Oh, yes, Grandfather! But—that—is—home, too-o-o-o-oo!"

By that time she was sobbing wildly, and the Colonel's red bandanna had to become very busy flapping away flies, although there was no one to see how often it brushed across his eyes, just by accident.

"There! There! There!" he said, after a while. "I never once thought of your being homesick, little girl! I reckon I'm a good deal of a failure as a grandfather! Didn't begin in time! That's it!" Oh, he knew how to have her immediately up in arms for him!

"You are not!" she cried, looking up at him reproachfully. "You are not a failure at all! You ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying such a thing! You are an old darling,

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but—I—I want—to see my Mother-dear—and Dad!”

She had to hide her face once more against his sleeve, but the Colonel gave the table a bang which sent all the Christmas things up into the air in fantastic little jumps.

“There!” he cried vigorously. “There! I knew there was something I’ve been wanting, but I couldn’t find out what it was! Now, why didn’t we think of it before, Sybilla? I want to see those twins! God bless my soul! I’ve *got* to see those twins! Now, why didn’t I realize that sooner? Hey?”

Sybil swung around to look up into his face. “Do you mean it?” she cried. “Will you go?”

As if he would not have gone to the ends of the earth with that adored granddaughter of his! “I will that!” he declared, adding, “If you’ll go with me? Hey?”

So it happened that the big express box was sent off in good time, with not a word or a hint of the surprise that was to follow. Mr. John and Miss Sophia thought they could have a very happy Christmas alone together at Montebello, and declared that traveling did not appeal to them, anyway.

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"It isn't that I am timid at all," Miss Sophia, who had never been out of the county, confided to Sybil, "but I think all this traveling by land and water is apt to make one dissatisfied with home—don't you, my dear?"

Sybil smiled. "It might work the other way with you, Cousin Sophia," she said, "and make you glad to get back!"

She still called the little old lady "Cousin," instead of "Aunt"; Miss Sophia had asked her to do so, saying, "It makes us seem so much more of an age, my dear!"

Now Miss Sophia shook her head. "Well, my dear, perhaps it might, but I think it is just as well to keep out of temptation. It's not that I am in the least afraid of those steamboats and railroad trains, for I'm sure a great many people survive them. But I have heard that it is quite easy for a female to become—er—emancipated, and—and bold, and—well, on the whole I think I'd better stay at home with dear Brother John!"

It was the day before Christmas when the Colonel and Sybil arrived in South Wickham. She wanted to walk in upon the family unannounced, so refused to drive up, and led

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her willing grandfather through back streets, lest they might meet some of the family, and stole past the stable, and up to the side door, and opened it without knocking, and walked into the dining-room where the family were at supper—and then what wild joy there was! What a welcoming tenderness for Sybil in Mother-dear's arms! What a shout from Hallam, what bashful gladness from old Dick, what a warmth of greeting between the doctor and the beaming old gentleman! What a dignified hand-shake, that brought flushes to the faces of both, from Donald to the Sybil who was no longer a sister, even in name! And above all, what dances and shrieks of glee from the twins, and what shouts of laughter from everyone else when they hugged the Colonel before they remembered the feud against him! And how pleased the Colonel was when they called him "Grandfather," quite as a matter of course! And next morning what exclamations there were at the tree, as if they had not all helped to trim it the evening before! And what satisfaction over the presents, and what joy at all being together again! And what fun there was, all that week, when South Wickham did

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its festive best to show Sybil how much it loved her, and succeeded in making the Colonel the proudest old gentleman in the world!

It really did seem as if such happiness ought to go on forever, in just that way, without any change or difference! They welcomed each day with its good times without a thought that its coming but hastened its going! For each day was brimming with gladness and friendliness and affection—and who could stop to realize that such hours must come to an end? Yet they passed, and the time of separation drew near. On the last afternoon before Donald must go back to college, he and Sybil went off, with skates over their shoulders, for a climb to High Meadow Pond. They skated awhile, then stopped at that boulder of granite which had been the resting place of so many generations of skaters. A few other couples were skimming over the pond, but Donald and Sybil were unaware of them.

They had been talking of Montebello, and Fordham, and the good times there last summer. They had spoken no word of Sybil's changed fortunes, and of Jack Rutherford they had spoken only in passing.

WHAT SYBIL SAID

"You will come down for all of next summer, Don," said Sybil, looking across the frozen pond towards distant Maryland, with eyes that told she was thinking of a place she loved.

"Not next summer, Sybil, nor for a good many summers," he said.

She looked up at him quickly. "Why, Donald! What is the matter? Why do you say that?"

"Because I am going to work, next summer. You know I have my own way to make, and I cannot begin too soon. I have got to succeed, Sybil!"

"Of course," she said, simply. "But you can come to Montebello in between!"

There was a change in Donald's voice as he answered: "I shall not come to Montebello again, Sybil, until—until I have something to show for my work!"

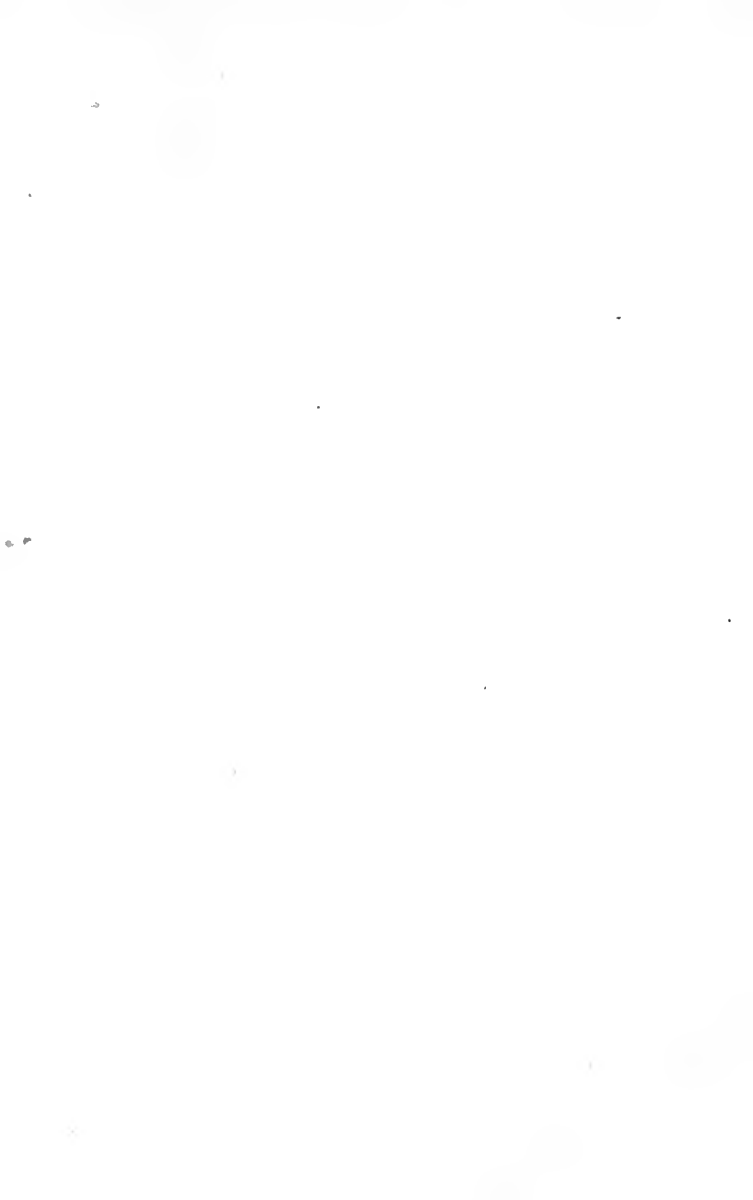
"Oh, Donald!" she began, in protest; but something came into his eyes, and she turned from him, flushing. For a long time, as it seemed, neither spoke; then Donald asked, bending toward her a little:

"Sybil, when I've made good, when I do come back to Montebello, will you be there?"

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Her voice was so low that he scarcely heard the answer. "Yes, Donald! I shall be there—waiting!" she whispered. And he carried that whisper with him through the years.

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